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must-see
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SYSTEM!

IN DEPTH

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sub/sats fight to
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Printed in the UK by Polestar Colchester, on behalf of Future
Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT; Tel: 0207 429 4000
Veneered boards: supplied by Ton Xanthas @ Reliance Veneer Company LTD (London 020 8802 2361, www.relianceveneers.co.uk) Wallpaper: Supplied from wallpaper direct (www.wallpaperdirect.co.uk, part of the Graham & Brown collection, www.grahambrown.com)

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Next issue on sale: December 17 2009

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).

www.futureplc.com

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WELCOME

Televisions are changing... again. Just as we were getting used to the current flatscreen landscape, a new generation of superscreens has marched onto the High Street, threatening to make regular sets look as exciting as a copy of last week's *TV Times*. With cutting-edge features such as LED backlighting for better picture quality and internet TV with multimedia networking, these displays demand to be auditioned. That's why this issue we compare the latest models that push the boundaries of TV reception (p26) and **go in-depth with Sharp's scintillating new LED bigscreen**, the LC52LE700E (p52). Elsewhere you'll find an exclusive interview with Ren Klyce, the award-winning sound designer of *Fight Club*, about the upcoming 10th Anniversary Edition Blu-ray (p24), and an in-depth test of the latest heavyweight THX receiver from Onkyo, the TX-NR807 (p70).

The world of home entertainment tech moves at a cracking pace. To ensure that you keep up to speed, subscribe to *Home Cinema Choice*. For our latest promotional offer, turn to p104.

Enjoy the show!

Steve May

TEAM HCC

Steve May:
The UK's most experienced AV Editor with 20+ years as a CE journo on his clock



Anton van Beek:
News Ed Anton began his pro-videophile career over a decade ago



Mark Craven:
HCC's Production Editor can write shorthand – he can't read it, though



Rik Henderson:
HCC's Dep Ed is an AV and videogames nut – and former TV presenter



Chris Jenkins:
Our ISF-calibrated Tech Labs manager is the former Editor of *Total DVD* mag



John Rook:
Art Editor John first worked on HCC back in 1999, when TVs were made of wood



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A £900
YAMAHA
AV SOUND
SYSTEM!
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System addict

Marantz unleashes stunning slim-line AVR and matching entry-level Blu-ray player

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Shed heaven!

Meet the HCC reader with a cinema at the bottom of his garden

All speakers great and small



Looking for a home cinema speaker system? We put four affordable 5.1 packages through their paces in the HCC Test Labs (p88)...

KEF KHT2005.3 K1

Monitor Audio Vector AV

Tannoy Mercury F-Custom

Wharfedale Diamond 10 HCP

TECH LABS

Our guarantee to you:

Equipment reviewed in Home Cinema Choice is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best-possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase



CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Martin Pipe:

Technology specialist
Martin co-developed HCC's
Tech Lab operation



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journal ERT



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The UK's foremost expert in
extreme audio writes about
bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Jim Hill:

Apple fanatic Hill is the
former editor of T3 Home
and a What Hi-Fi escapee



Jon Thompson:

Post-production specialist
whose credits include
Casino Royale and Kill Bill



John Archer:

The UK's most experienced
TV tester cut his teeth as an
early HCC staffer



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COVER STORY

COVER STORY

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To experience the extraordinary contact Gecko on 0845 262 2882
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BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** PHILIPS TEASES iPLAYER Catch-up service expected to join Net TV platform **SKINNY TV** Samsung makes 3.9mm LCD **LOEWE LAUNCH** £20K Reference system unveiled **SONY CHANGES TUNER** Freesat HD Bravia LCDs announced **THE HURT LOCKER** Explosive Gulf War thriller arrives on BD **DEMO'D** One-stop guide to the best bits of *Fast & Furious*

System addict

Marantz NR1501 AVR/BD5004 Blu-ray player → www.marantz.com

Feast your eyes on this brand-new slimline AV receiver and Blu-ray deck from high-end favourite Marantz. Despite its compact size, the NR1501 AVR still packs 7 x 50W amplification, Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA decoding and four HDMI inputs. The matching BD5004 BD player features 36bit DeepColour support, Burr Brown 24bit/192kHz audio DACs and DivX HD/ AVCHD compatibility. They retail for a very tempting £450 each.



HCC Online...

Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at www.homecinemachoice.com Follow us on Twitter @hccmag

Sony's first Freesat

Sony Bravia Z5800 → www.sony.co.uk

Sony has plunged into the world of Freesat HD with its Z5800 range of Bravia LCD TVs. Available now in 40in, 46in and 52in flavours (priced between £1,600 and £2,500), the screens offer plenty of features on top of the built-in Freesat tuner, including Motionflow 200Hz, Bravia Engine 3 processing, a claimed 100,000:1 dynamic contrast ratio, and Eco features that reduce power consumption compared to previous models by 30 per cent. Check back next issue for a full review.

Partner with...

Teufel System 8 THX Ultra2

5.1 speaker system

£2,700 approx

If you want to marry your new flatscreen to high-quality surround sound, check out the latest addition to Teufel's THX-branded lineup of complete 5.1 speaker packages. It might be the smallest THX Ultra 2 system in the world, but, says the German brand, its 500W subwoofer 'exceeds the most demanding THX Ultra2 requirements.'

www.teufel.eu



Blu-ray jukebox



Fed up of having to get up and change discs in your Blu-ray player? Well, help is on the way in the

form of Sony's BDP-CX7000ES. Due to hit retail early next year (price around £700) this so-called 'mega-changer' is designed to house an entire movie and music collection – well, 400 Blu-ray/DVD/CDs. As with other players in Sony's ES range, the CX7000ES features Precision Cinema HD Upscale, HD Reality Enhancer and Super Bitmapping technologies, plus support for HD audio codecs.

Scene stealer



Optoma continues to develop its ThemeScene DLP projector range with the HD86. This Full

HD PJ offers full lens shift for easy installation, and the second generation of the brand's Puremotion 2 frame interpolation technology. Other highlights include a customisable colour management system, triple HDMI inputs and a pair of 12V triggers. The HD86 is available with a choice of optical lenses – standard, long-throw and short-throw (priced £3,300, £3,700 and £4,200 respectively).

Taking aim at the mid-range



Yamaha has a new AVR looking to carve itself a niche in the competitive performance market.

The seven-channel RX-V2065 receiver features 5-in/2-out HDMI, ultra-low jitter circuitry for accurate audio reproduction, YPAO (Yamaha Parametric Room Acoustic Optimisation) sound optimiser, proprietary Yamaha Cinema DSP 3D audio processing and all-new easy-to-use GUI and network functions. Priced at £1,100.

Philips makes iPlayer tease

Catch-up service expected to feature on Net TVs within a year

Philips' Senior Director of Net TV, Robert Timmer, has revealed to *HCC* that he'd be 'very disappointed' if BBC's iPlayer service wasn't added to the brand's networking platform within the next twelve months.

In an exclusive interview, Timmer revealed how close the Dutch TV manufacturer is to taking its Net TV feature to the next level, and stealing a march on its Far Eastern rivals.

'At IFA, we showed catch-up TV services from the German channels ARD and ZDF, with whom we have worked this out already,' said Timmer. 'Those services are available now, and we are talking to the main broadcasters across Europe – including ones in the UK – to get their services on Net TV as well. That includes the BBC.'

When asked if *HCC* readers could expect iPlayer-touting Philips LCDs within the year, Timmer said: 'If it doesn't happen within that timeframe, I would be very disappointed. It's very obvious that services like catch-up TV, and for that matter anything else video-related, are very well appreciated by consumers.'



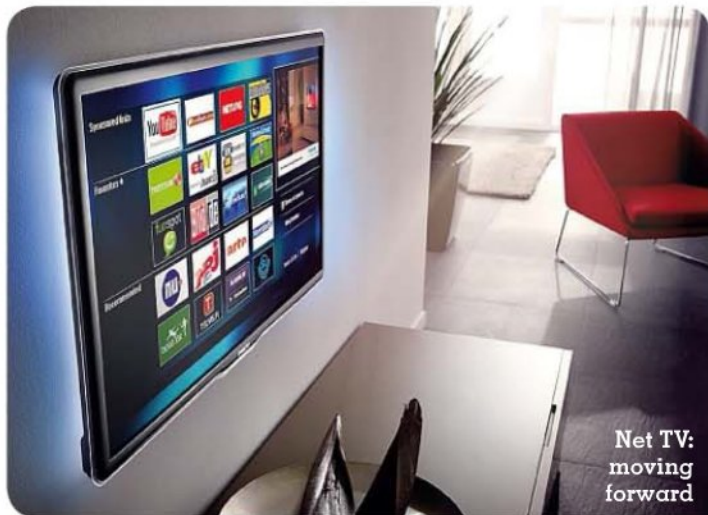
'Internet on TV is here to stay' believes Philips'
Robert Timmer

Philips' Net TV portal is, of course, already present on the brand's 9000, 8000 and 21:9 series screens (see p26 for more), and currently offers an in-built Opera browser, tunin.fm radio, plus dedicated apps including YouTube and eBay. Yet Philips is gearing up to an Apple-style open-arms policy toward content providers, meaning an explosion of services is likely.

'It's very labour-intensive to work with content and service providers, because you have to go out and work almost at a personal level with each one,' says the Philips chief. 'In our next phase we will make our Net TV software development kit publicly available. That basically means that content service providers – commercial or community – can make a service for Net TV without first talking to us.'

There will be quality control, though – 'they have to make sense to the consumer and have to work properly' – and services will be able to be added as favourites, or blocked off entirely if you wish.

So, does Timmer envisage a time when every flatscreen TV in Philips' range will have Net TV built into it? 'Let's put it this way,' begins the reply. 'We are day-to-day strengthening our belief that internet on TVs is here to stay. Logically, that would mean that all TVs would be internet-connected, just as PCs are.'



Net TV:
moving
forward

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month

1 Stargate Universe (Sky One HD)



This new gritty spin-off series looks nice in HD but does it work? The jury's out... *Steve May*

2 Flashforward (Five)



Dubbing this intelligent sci-fi series the new *Lost* is wholly inaccurate. It's much better! *Rik Henderson*

3 Ghosts of Girlfriends Past (R2 DVD)



Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* given a 21st century twist. Good, honest lightweight stuff. *Mark Craven*

4 Freddy Vs Jason (Region B BD)



Watching two horror icons knock skulls has never looked or sounded this good. *Anton van Beek*

5 Designing the Decades (BBC Four)



If you missed this, watch it on iPlayer. It reveals why Britain leads the world in design. *John Rook*

Demo'd!

This issue, the AV highlights of... *Fast & Furious* on Blu-ray

Rock and roll



06.35: An attempt at hijacking oil tankers goes horribly out of control, culminating with a flaming tanker barrelling across the screen from left-to-right. Unsurprisingly it's a sequence rich with big bass and superb positional audio.

Crash and burn



21.09: When Vin Diesel's drift-racing guru visits the site of a fatal car crash and starts piecing together the events leading to it, you're treated to an impressive piece of vehicular mayhem packed with high-impact DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics....

Great balls of fire



58.15: This nighttime chase across the US-Mexico border showcases the VC-1 2.40:1 encode's excellent shadow detail and black levels – and it all comes to a visually-spectacular conclusion courtesy of an eye-searing explosion.

Pole position



60.00: *F&F*'s final car chase looks sensational no matter how chaotic the action gets. It's a masterpiece of sound design, too. Whack up your amp and hold on to your sofa!

His master's cinema

HMV and Curzon Artificial Eye launch digital theatre concept

The end of October saw the opening of the hmvcurzon cinema in the heart of Wimbledon, described as an attempt to bring 'quality cinema and entertainment to the heart of local communities.'

The trendsetting partnership between High Street retailer HMV and cinema operator/film distributor Curzon Artificial Eye is attempting to deliver a whole new film-going experience by integrating digital cinemas into space tied to existing branches of the film and music retailer.

If the idea sounds a little mad, the execution is simply faultless. Popping along to the Wimbledon launch, *HCC* was bowled over by the way in which the three-screen digital cinema and adjoining licensed café has been so seamlessly integrated into the existing store.

HMV Group chief executive Simon Fox shares our enthusiasm. 'If you'd seen this area six months ago, it literally was a dusty old storeroom and I think the transformation is unbelievable. We never used this second floor at all.

'This stores makes about half of its money on DVD sales, so we know we're already attracting film-lovers'.

Just as inviting as the bar area, the three screens (with a combined total of 263 seats) use cutting-edge Barco Christie digital projectors to deliver a first-rate movie experience. 'We use 2K models,' reveals Philip Knatchbull, the Chief Executive of Curzon Artificial Eye, 'We did look at 4K projectors, but I don't think that it was necessary when you've got the intimacy of these small [4m x 2.5m]



Simon Fox (with the HMV dog) and Philip Knatchbull

screens. And the tech is changing so fast – as soon as you do one thing something else comes along. So we're just concentrating on what works and what we already use in our existing cinemas'.

A new era

HMV bigwig Fox thinks that the entire hmvcurzon experience could be just the kind of thing to tempt back home cinema fanatics whose faith in cinema-going has been eroded over the years. 'For many people, the only option in their vicinity is an out-of-town multiplex on a retail park. The whole idea of this concept is to bring comfortable, quality cinema to town centres,

with a licensed bar, sandwiches, coffee.

'Hopefully, by improving the environment – and indeed the range of films we show – we may convince some *HCC* readers to come back to the cinema.'

Despite this ambition, there's no word yet on a further rollout hmvcurzon cinemas. *HCC* was only told by Fox and Knatchbull that if the Wimbledon trial proves successful then they will start to identify other appropriate HMV locations across the UK.



Return of the über geek



Quentin Tarantino's biggest grossing film, *Inglourious Basterds*, will be hoping for even more success when it arrives on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on December 7, courtesy of Universal Pictures. In terms of extras, the DVD offers up three alternate/extended scenes, trailers and the full cut of the film-within-a-film *Nation's Pride*. The BD has an additional roundtable discussion, interviews, poster gallery and a look at the original Italian movie *Inglorious Bastards*.

Alien Nation



2009 has been a cracking year for sci-fi films, with the likes of indie hit *Moon* and blockbuster reboot *Star Trek* proving there's plenty of life left in the genre. *HCC*'s favourite, though, was Neill Blomkamp's sensational *District 9*, which Sony Pictures is bringing to the UK on 28 December on both DVD and Blu-ray platters. DVD extras include a three-part doc and chat track, while the BD adds Sony's impressive MovieIQ mode, BD-Live Cinechat feature and five additional mini docs.

Just for laughs



Adam Sandler tries his hand at something a little more serious than usual in Judd Apatow's *Funny People*. Starring alongside Apatow regular Seth Rogen, Sandler plays a terminally-ill stand-up comic trying to take his life more seriously. Universal Pictures is bringing an extended cut of the flick to R2 DVD and Region B BD on January 18, with copious extras including deleted scenes, a commentary, featurettes and plenty of BD exclusives (including stand-up material from Sandler and Rogen).



DENON

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AVR-1910 High Definition AV receiver | DBP-2010 Blu-ray Player // This mighty duo offers three outstanding characteristics that will lift you up to a new dimension of home cinema: More than 50 experts of the renowned EISA Awards Jury have voted the AVR-1910 to be the best home theatre receiver 2009-2010. Its Dolby ProLogic IIz sound program supports two additional front height speakers to deliver an even more spacial surround experience. And last but not least: the DBP-2010 offers BD Profile 2.0, multiple format playback as well as leading edge 10-bit video processing to get the most even out of your old DVDs. Go and visit this show first at your local retailer or www.denon.co.uk



*Best Home Cinema Receiver 2009-2010
Denon AVR-1910*



After six years in the wilderness (well, making short movies and TV shows) director Kathryn Bigelow (*Point Break*) returned to cinema screens in the Summer with her sensational Gulf-war thriller *The Hurt Locker*. Following the nail-biting exploits of a US bomb-disposal squad working in Iraq, the movie comes to DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on December 28, accompanied by behind-the-scenes footage, cast/crew interviews and a lossless DTS-HD 5.1 mix.

It's da bomb!

The Hurt Locker → Lionsgate → R2 DVD & All-region BD



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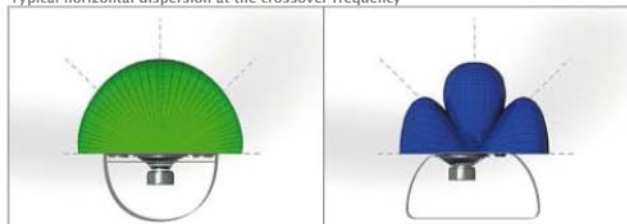
What you want above all from a 5.1 surround sound system is accuracy – and that depends on the quality of your centre speaker, which typically handles around 60% of the soundtrack content.

So why settle for a conventional satellite in this crucial role? Even worse, one plonked on its side?

You instantly notice the difference with our dedicated KHT3005SE high performance centre speaker because it's specifically designed for the job: with twin 75mm (3in.) bass drivers flanking KEF's latest Uni-Q® HF/midrange array in an acoustically inert cast aluminium enclosure, it combines superbly natural vocals with hefty frontal 'slam' for dramatic effects.

Even more importantly, it avoids all the lobing problems you get from using a vertical speaker sideways, with the sound image varying erratically from one place to the next. Instead, the unrivalled dispersion of Uni-Q allows everyone to share the same strikingly detailed 3D experience, wherever they sit. And that's true dedication for you.

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Pick'n'mix

Ex lead singer of The Skids and TV presenter/filmmaker Richard Jobson picks his five favourite DVDs...



1 The Thin Red Line

'The best war movie ever made. Poignant, poetic and tragic.'

2 A Clockwork Orange

'Kubrick having fun with youth, politics and violence.'

3 In the Mood for Love

'Writer-director Wong Kar Wai at his most romantic and melancholy.'

4 The Sweet Smell of Success

'Nasty, cruel and so close to the truth.'

5 Old Boy

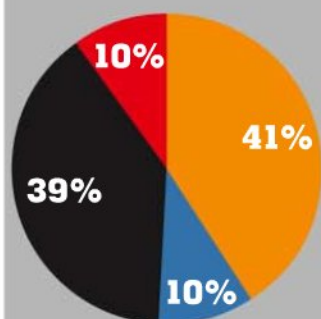
'The East is the beast.'

Richard Jobson's *New Town Killers*, a critically-acclaimed thriller about two private bankers hunting kids for kicks, is available to buy now on DVD and Blu-ray, courtesy of High Fliers.

We asked...

How excited are you about Freeview HD?

- Very – I'm planning to buy a receiver as soon as possible
- Not so much – I'm getting a Sky+HD or Virgin Media system instead
- I'm already sorted – I have a hi-def broadcast source
- I'll pass – I'm more interested in Blu-ray



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Whole lotta Loewe

German brand launches new stores and premium AV system

It's been a year since German AV brand Loewe moved into the UK High Street with its first wave of bespoke Loewe Galerie dealerships. Despite the difficult economic climate of the past two years, the concept has been a triumph, with Kevin Kelly, Loewe UK Managing Director, claiming that its stores have achieved a 63 per cent increase in sales year on year. So it's hardly surprising that the company has now rolled out six additional Galeries across the UK in Kensington, Chichester, Manchester, Sheffield, Southampton and the Lake District.

New products are on the way, too, with Loewe using the opening of its Kensington Galerie to showcase its Reference home entertainment system. Adhering to the brand's ethos of combining cutting-edge tech with eye-catching design, the Reference system is certainly gorgeous and generously specced – consisting of a 200Hz 52in Full HD LCD TV with an integrated 500GB HDD, plus Loewe's multi-talented Mediacenter (a CD-playing, DVD-upscaling, media-streaming, multiroom audio server), Highline subwoofer and wafer-thin electrostatic speakers. At £20,000 it's a pricey proposition (Frieder C. Löhner, Loewe's CEO joked it's 'equivalent to four people going to the cinema sixteen times a week'), but one that cements Loewe's position as a true premium AV brand.

Clear message

Away from the new hardware, HCC asked Löhner his view on Loewe's critics, who claim the brand simply follows in the footsteps of other, bigger manufacturers: 'It's true that we do not innovate everything possible,' he replied. 'But that



3D won't truly arrive for at least eight years, believes Loewe CEO Frieder C Löhner

is because we're committed to only doing things that are of real value to the consumer. They are bombarded with ideas, but

we are one of the few companies that provides a clear message they can easily understand'.

So where does 3D, the current buzz word in home entertainment circles, fit into that strategy? Löhner is clear: 'I believe it will still be another eight, nine, ten years before 3D is truly here. There is a desire for 3D – but remember the platform for high-definition was decided 19 years ago and we've only recently entered the age of HD.'

'We demonstrated 3D three years ago at IFA, but we know it's not stable. At Loewe we believe that consumers will only really embrace 3D when they no longer need spectacles to watch it.'

And with Pioneer withdrawing from the high-end TV market, who is Loewe's main competition? Löhner volunteers the likes of Sony,

Samsung and Philips as potential candidates (the latter primarily due to its flagship Cinema 21:9 model), but his ultimate choice is Danish audiophile favourites Bang & Olufsen. Not, however, without a caveat. 'We really do admire Bang & Olufsen. They were a really strong brand a couple of years ago, but they lost a lot of ground recently. I just really hope they come back soon'.

Reference status:

Loewe's premium system



Oppo denied!



There's bad news for anybody who fancies picking up the multi-talented Oppo BDP-831 Blu-ray

player (reviewed and raved about in the last issue of HCC). When the Oppo store website finally went live at the end of October (www.oppo.co.uk), consumers were met with this message: 'After careful evaluation of the resources available, it has been determined that the release of the Oppo BDP-831 in Europe will be postponed indefinitely... We hope we can come back with better planning and resources in the future.'

Denon gives birth to baby Blu-ray



This month sees the release of Denon's new 'little brother' reference Blu-ray

deck, the £1,900 BD-4010UD. Boasting many of the same features and cutting-edge technologies of the company's top-end DVD-A1UD model, this universal player packs Advanced AL24 audio processor circuitry, Anchor Bay Technologies VRS video processing, Denon's Pixel Image Correction tech and a multi-layer chassis structure for minimal vibration and quiet operation.

Klipsch systems



'If somebody buys an HDTV and doesn't have hi-def surround sound to go with it, it's like buying

a Ferrari without the engine,' says Mike Klipsch, president of the US AV company that bears his name. This is why Klipsch has introduced two affordable 5.1 systems to its lineup. The £500 HD Theatre 500 features gloss black surrounds with 2.5in woofers and 0.75in aluminium dome tweeters, plus a down-firing 8in sub; the £400 HD Theatre 300 boasts similar specs but ships with a smaller sub and vinyl finish.

This month's top ten news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 CEATEC goes 3D
3D was unsurprisingly the hot topic at Japan's top AV show, CEATEC. Panasonic used the event to debut the first 50in plasma panel fully compatible with the upcoming 3D Blu-ray standard, while Sony showed off eight 3D prototypes, hinting at a commercial release in 2010.

2 Skinny telly
Forget ultra-thin OLED screens, South Korean tech giant Samsung recently unveiled the world's thinnest LED LCD screen. Measuring just 3.9mm deep and saddled with the nickname 'Needle Thin LCD', there's no word on when it'll come to market, but the company has confirmed that it offers a 120Hz refresh rate and a claimed 5,000:1 contrast ratio.

3 Sky high sales
BSkyB continues to buck the recession, with a recent financial report claiming it's added 250,000 HD subscribers in the past three months, selling a Sky+HD box every 30 seconds to reach a total of 1.6 million households.

4 Tiny amp
Audio whiz Onkyo has developed a micro-digital amp that measures just 25 x 20mm, designed to work specifically with the low impedance loudspeakers found in flatpanel TVs. Onkyo brags its diminutive amplifier will bring significant sonic benefits to products where design has previously precluded discrete digital amplification.

5 Eye-eye
The eyes of a giant Australian shrimp could usher in a new age of high-quality AV kit, if scientists at the University of Bristol are to be believed. The shrimps see in 12 primary colours (four times more than us lowly humans) and the boffins reckon they can replicate the light-sensitive cells responsible to create CD and DVD players capable of handling far more information than current models.

6 BT misses target
BT Vision's CEO Marc Watson has admitted that the service will not hit its target of between two or three million subscribers by December 2010: 'We have not found the best way of explaining what the benefits are to consumers, and what [BT Vision] stands for.' Maybe an ad campaign without that lad from *My Family* would be start.

7 Seeing red
The BBC switched off two of its three Red Button interactive services on Freeview in October to make way for hi-def content, which is due to become available in some areas as early as December. This means an end to the BBC's News Multiscreen for Freeview viewers, and the interactive stream often used for sports and music coverage.

8 Gooooo!
The world's first full game of football has been screened in 3D at selected cinemas in Mexico city. The match, which saw America beat Guadalajara 1-0, was described by one attendee as 'incredible'.

9 Power aid
Fed up with your phone running out of battery? Don't mind storing meths in the house? Then Toshiba's Fuel-Cell, dubbed the Dynario, is for you. Connect it to any portable CE product via a USB lead, and it'll give a near instant power top-up. Fuel-Cell technology uses the chemical reaction caused when methanol and ambient oxygen are mixed to produce electricity; with one refill of methanol, the Dynario can make enough juice to charge two mobiles, says Tosh.

10 Disney does downloads
The House of Mouse has outlined its plans for a disc-free future in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*. The Keychain initiative will allow consumers to purchase viewing rights to a film or TV show, rather than a disc, which can then be accessed digitally from a 'cloud server' to view on a networked TV or mobile device.



Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Mad Tom?



Aussie filmmaker George Miller has been spilling the beans on his plans for a new *Mad Max* movie. Believing that Mel Gibson is too old to return to the lead role, Miller says he's keen on getting Brit actor Tom 'Bronson' Hardy to step in (pictured). He also revealed that he's chasing Charlize Theron for the film's female lead.

It's a scream!

The end of the world is nigh. Well, not quite, but it feels like it, following the news that The Weinstein Company is working on another *Scary Movie*, erm, movie. Make it stop!

Turtle power!

Cowabunga! The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles could soon be returning to the silver screen, with Nickelodeon paying out \$60million to buy the franchise and announcing plans for a new TV series and 2012 movie release.

Shatner beams in



While talking about plans for the next *Star Trek* movie, director JJ Abrams has said he's trying to figure out a way of involving William Shatner – last seen trekking in *Star Trek: Generations*. Sounds like an attempt to win over the fanboy doubters.

Grimm oop North

A new Ridley Scott movie is seemingly announced every month, with only one-in-ten actually reaching the screen. Anyway, this month's news is that he'll be helming an Americanised adaptation of David Peace's Yorkshire-based *Red Riding Quartet*, which was already adapted by Channel 4 earlier this year.

News x10



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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson outlines why some AV hardware manufacturers are returning to the UK

As I staggered around the *Hi-Fi Choice Awards* (HCC's sister publication) last month, with a glass of fizz in one hand and a fat Cuban in the other (she was a nice girl), I asked several manufacturers about business in general. Arcam's Charlie Brennan was very positive, particularly as the company had decided to 'repatriate its manufacturing'. For many years the company has produced the bulk of its kit in the Far East, but a number of factors have made it more viable to bring the manufacturing back to Blighty. And first off the new production line will be an AV receiver launching early next year.

I can understand this because I am intimately familiar with the angst of manufacturing in China. One of my other jobs (it's not all loafing around watching movies, you know) is as consultant product manager to an AV furniture maker. Like almost all UK brands in the AV industry, products are designed in this country and made in a number of factories across southern China. The process is beset with issues.

Firstly, there is the language barrier. This makes getting across precisely what you want, in the quality you want, when you want it, a challenge from day one. And even if all facets have been accurately communicated there is great scope for the factory to blame errors or specification changes on alleged misunderstandings.

Then there is the cultural issue, and I'm not just talking about having to eat with two little sticks rather than a spoon. Chinese manufacturers will bend over backwards to please the customer. No bad thing, but it often means the factory agrees to everything the customer demands irrespective of whether the demands are probable, practical or even possible. Two-to-six months later, after a few dodgy prototypes massively out of specification and a fortune in tooling costs, the factory admits defeat and everything goes back to the drawing board.

Even once the manufacturing is finalised, the prototype is perfect and costs have been agreed (often a lot higher than originally estimated), there are still major hurdles. You need to ensure ongoing quality from the factory, which requires constant supervision. You need to organise shipping logistics and customs clearance. You need to protect the goods against container condensation (AKA 'container rain') and shipping damage while they're negotiating high seas and tentacled sea-monsters. There will be a four-week delay travelling to the UK – and then **some belligerent half-wit of a customs officer will impound your container** because he thinks your extruded metal tubing could be gun parts! Trust me, it happens.

Then there are the costs. It used to be so cheap to manufacture in China that leaping through all these flaming hoops was worth the effort. Today it is a different financial proposition altogether. The fluctuating exchange rate moves the real cost in pound notes daily and the pound absolutely sucks against the dollar (the default manufacturing currency). The price of Chinese labour has soared – average wages for factory workers increasing three fold in the last two years. The price of fuel for machinery and shipping has soared. The price of raw materials has soared. Chinese taxes and duties have soared. I could go on...

It's no wonder that a lot of British brands are moving their manufacturing back to the UK. For high-value, quality-driven and performance-centric products like home cinema hardware UK-manufacturing makes a lot of sense. It improves time to market, design, logistics, fine-tuning, quality control, delivery and after-sales support. It's also great news for UK PLC. For that, I salute Arcam's move ■

For more of Richard Stevenson's ramblings log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/points_of_view

Richard Stevenson loves China really. He's even applied to be a Royal Doulton expert on *Antique's Roadshow*





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DVD ADDICT

This issue, **The Beek** is worried by the presence of movie reviewers with memories like elephants

How good is your memory? Think back to something you did yesterday, perhaps a meeting you had with another person, and try to visualise it in your mind. Now concentrate on the clarity of the mental image you have conjured up. How clearly has your brain focused the picture? For instance, how sure can you be that the colour of clothing you are recreating in your 'mind's eye' is 100 per cent accurate? What about the fleshtones and minute details like pores and spots on the other person's face? Tough, isn't it?

Now think back to a similar conversation that happened six months ago. How well can you visualise that? And what about one that happened a couple of decades ago?

I ask you this because I've got a bee in my bonnet about Joe Dante's 1984 creature feature *Gremlins*, specifically some reviews of the US Blu-ray that have surfaced online that criticise its picture quality. That's not a problem in itself – **everyone's entitled to their opinion and I'm not pretending to be some all-knowing paragon of AV know-how** who can never be in the wrong. No, the problem I have is the surprisingly large number of reviewers/bloggers claiming *Gremlins* looks much darker and softer on Blu-ray than it did when they saw it at the cinema 25 years ago. In case you missed it, that would be people claiming that a hi-def encode they just saw looks different (in this case, worse) than a film print they viewed down at the Odeon a quarter of a century ago.

Now, it's only been a week since I went to see horror-comedy *Zombieland* at my local multiplex. I could bore you all for hours about how absolutely brilliant the film is, but I'll be buggered if I can tell you exactly how grainy the picture was, or describe

the exact shade of red of the copious amounts of blood. Apparently, though, some of these folks online can remember every single image detail about a movie from a screening they attended in the 1980s. With powers of recollection like that, they should be challenging Derren Brown for a Friday night TV spot, rather than writing about Blu-ray encodes on the 'net.

Crystal-clear critters

When I gawped wide-eyed at these comments, I'd already been sent a UK review copy of *Gremlins*, given it a quick spin in my player and been reasonably impressed by what I'd seen. Of course, upon finding I was in almost total disagreement with the most vocal opinions being bandied about, I sat down with the Blu-ray once more, armed with a pen and notepad, to give it a thorough going over.

And you know what? I still think it's a pretty decent encode. Yes, Warner Home Video's disc doesn't quite reach the pinnacle of hi-def visuals (it'll never be used as an in-store demo), but compared to other back-catalogue Blu-ray releases of the same vintage, there's nothing here that offends my sensibilities. Indeed, compared to the dismal-looking R2 DVD that *Gremlins* fans have been lumbered with, it offers everything you'd expect from a BD upgrade – enhanced colour reproduction, plenty of fine detail and a dazzling filmic look.

This brings us back to my original point. We need to start judging Blu-ray discs on their own merits, and the hard factual evidence we have to hand, not on whatever vague, idealised and undoubtedly incorrect notions we have about what a specific film should look like in hi-def ●

For more wit and wisdom from *The Beek* go to www.homecinemachoice.com/dvd_addict

Anton van Beek
sometimes has
difficulty
remembering,
erm, what he was
going to, erm...
Hang on, we've
forgotten



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DEEP FOCUS

Hollywood insider **Jon Thompson** worries that remastered classic films are in danger of losing their lustre

It brings a smile to all our faces that the supposed leader of the free world, the UK's very own Prime Minister Gordon Brown, had a little AV problem. I love it when things like this happen.

The story is this: when Mr Brown met with Barack Obama recently, the US President gave our PM a set of 25 American films, including the Hitchcock classic *Psycho* (is he trying to say something?). While the Browns were settling down to a night of movies, old Gordon popped the disc into Number 10's DVD player, only to be greeted with the message 'Wrong Region'. Although he mournfully had to put the popcorn away, he is unlikely to jeopardise the special relationship – or 'special partnership', as we are now supposed to call it – by registering a complaint. A Downing Street spokesman said he was 'confident' that any gift Obama gave Brown would have been 'well-thought through.' Of the 25 films given to him, I wouldn't be surprised if *Clueless* was amongst them.

Mr Brown, on the other hand, presented a rather more thoughtful gift to the US President in the form of a penholder carved from the timbers of an anti-slavery ship. The sister ship, in fact, of the one that was broken up and turned into the desk in the Oval Office and Buckingham Palace. *National Treasure 2* anyone? The Blu-ray is region-free!

Obey your master!

Of course, classic films are a major factor in the release schedules of studios. Unfortunately, though, Hollywood is finding that its masters are not up to much when transferred to Blu-ray. Examples of this are *Full Metal Jacket* and *The Fifth Element*, which in the US had their initial BD releases withdrawn, and were then re-mastered and re-released.

Sometimes the remastering process causes controversy; with *The French Connection*, Fox

spent a lot of money giving director William Friedkin free reign to produce his version of the film. A new transfer was made and Mr Friedkin supervised the grade. A definitive version you would think? Well think again...

When a webcast called *Back by Midnight* interviewed cinematographer Owen Roizman, who photographed the film, all was going well until the end of the chat, when Roizman said of the new transfer: 'I would not put my name to it!'. Why was this? **Because it was not the film he shot in the 1970s.**

When Friedkin appeared on the webcast a week later to reply to the criticism, he defended his decision and mentioned that Roizman had screwed up a shot, which he could now fix! A poor excuse, as no one in over 30 years ever said anything about the under-exposed shots.

I have also seen *The French Connection* Blu-ray and it doesn't look great. Yet again, a director who thinks he knows how to do someone else's job makes a mess. Journalists talk about 'what the director intended', but often what the director intended was pulling some women and making a load of money – very few directors have any real talent and rely on talented people around them to make their movies. *The French Connection* now looks washed-out and lacks the depth which I remember seeing in the print. Owen Roizman is a very fine cinematographer and has a great eye. Not to let him be involved was stupid.

So those in charge of remastering back catalogue titles should be careful. When VHS came out we were just happy to see the movies we loved. DVD came along and we started to understand what quality meant. Now Blu-ray has arrived, we have a magnifying glass with which to scrutinise the images – and a 50in screen leaves no real room for error! ●

Are you unhappy with any remastered Blu-ray titles? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.co.uk

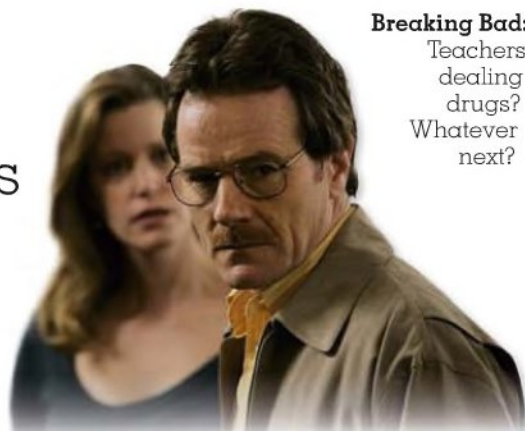
As a post-production expert, **Jon Thompson's** movie credits include *Casino Royale*, *Children of Men* and *Mission: Impossible 3*



Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **HCC's calendar** is here to make sure you don't miss out

Breaking Bad:
Teachers
dealing
drugs?
Whatever
next?



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				20 The Informant! Conspiracies, corruption and betrayal abound in Steven Soderbergh's new comedy, starring Matt Damon as a corporate exec-turned -bumbling FBI whistleblower. In UK cinemas from today theinformantmovie.com	21 The Homebuilding & Renovating Show This touring expo dedicated to home makeovers is a good starting place for anyone thinking of a DIY cinema install. Catch it this weekend at the Bath and West Showground www.homebuildingshow.com	22 JFK President Kennedy was assassinated on this day in 1963. Mark the occasion by revisiting Oliver Stone's sensational and controversial film JFK (which can be imported on All-region Blu-ray from the US) and figuring out whodunnit
		25 Paranormal Activity Following two years of festival screenings and plenty of online buzz, this ultra-scary handycam horror finally debuts at a cinema near you this Wednesday. Will you dare go and watch it? www.paranormalactivity-movie.com		27 Ninja Assassin James 'V for Vendetta' McTeigue directs this action/thriller about a good-hearted assassin who turns his back on his ninja chums - expect lots of CG-enhanced wire-fu mayhem. In UK cinemas from today www.ninja-assassin-movie.com		
30 The Proposal This surprise box office smash finds Sandra Bullock's uptight publisher forced to marry her laidback assistant Ryan Reynolds to get a US visa. If you fancy some light-hearted rom-com fun, track it down on UK DVD and Blu-ray today	01 Elex 2009 A trade-only two-day show for professional electricians that promises the chance to get 'hands-on' with the latest products' kicks off today at Surrey's Sandown Park www.elexshow.info			04 The Descent: Part 2 Sure to confuse UK audiences, this horror sequel follows on from the alternate ending (made for the US) of the original. Genre fans can catch it at cinemas across the UK this Friday www.thedescent2.co.uk	05 Gold rush In a message to Congress on this day in 1848, US President James Polk confirmed the discovery of gold in California, sparking the California Gold Rush. Revisit the epic <i>How the West Was Won</i> for Hollywood's version of events	06 Death of the '60s Gun-wielding concert-goer Meredith Hunter was killed by a Hell's Angel security guard at the Rolling Stones Altamont Speedway gig on this day in 1969. Check out the documentary covering the concert, <i>Gimme Shelter</i> , on DVD
07 GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra Yet another children's-toy-turned-mega-budget-Hollywood-blockbuster comes to DVD and Blu-ray in the UK today. But will it sell as well as rival <i>Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen</i> ?			10 Birthday boy Actor, director and Shakespeare addict Kenneth Branagh was born on this day in 1960. For a change of pace from the Bard's tales, his next directorial outing will be an adaptation of the Marvel comic series <i>Thor</i>	11 Where the Wild Things Are Spike Jonze's children's book adaptation is tipped to be a strong contender at next year's awards season. Is it overhyped? Find out in UK cinemas from today www.wherethewildthingsare.com		13 Birth of a legend Actor James Dean began his acting career on this day in 1950, filming a Pepsi commercial. Five years and three starring roles later, he was dead. Why not crack open a three-litre bottle in his memory?
14 Breaking Bad: Season One This sensational US TV drama series follows a middle-aged chemistry teacher making methamphetamine to help secure his family's finances. Very addictive - get it from your DVD dealer in the UK today			17 HCC #177 Start saving your pennies for HCC #177. Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed with hardware tests, installs, features, outspoken opinions and full-on software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com			

The image shows five Eclipse TD speakers. Two are positioned at the top, angled outwards. Three are in the center, arranged in a row. All speakers are black with a glossy finish and a prominent white circular driver in the center. They are mounted on silver-colored, tiered stands. The background is dark, and the speakers are reflected on the surface they are sitting on.

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THE FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB IS...

...listen to the audio! **Steve May** meets Ren Klyce, the award-winning sound designer of the '90s classic, which debuts as a 10th Anniversary Blu-ray special edition this month



It's been described as the ultimate blokes' movie, and remains one of the most visceral and influential films of the past decade. Now it's heading back to face the crowds in better shape than ever before. Ladeez and gennulmen, let's hear it for the tenth anniversary release of David Fincher's classic *Fight Club*!

If you're looking for an advert for the virtues of the Blu-ray format, this landmark slugfest is hard to beat. The video has been painstakingly remastered for its HD release, with director Fincher spending upwards of three months re-colouring the entire feature, tweaking greens here, toning down neon pinks there, until he was convinced that the film looked exactly how he envisaged it.

This is only appropriate. The visual style of *Fight Club* has steered a generation of TV and cinema, from the starkly-lit *CSI* franchise to a still-marching battalion of bleached-out blockbusters, and it remains unnervingly contemporary. Its audio chops, though, have proved harder to synthesize. Nothing sounds quite like it. Nominated for an Oscar in 2000, *Fight Club* is a masterpiece of sonic design and stands apart as one of the most inventive and inspiring examples of multichannel movie

audio available. To learn more, I chatted with the man responsible, sound designer Ren Klyce, on the Fox studio lot in LA prior to the film's BD debut.

Klyce is a long-time collaborator with the controversial Fincher, having also worked on *Se7en*, *The Game*, *Zodiac* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. 'Contrary to what a lot of people think about David,' confides Klyce, 'he's not a control freak. In my experience he lets you run with what you believe you should be doing and he gives you a lot of freedom.' He adds that working with a director who stands back from the production process is far worse: 'What's now happening is that there's often a disconnect between the sound editor and the director. As a result the sound designer builds everything up (in the mix) because they are not sure what the director wants. And the result becomes cacophonous!'

Perhaps surprisingly, *Fight Club* wasn't a big commercial hit when first released. 'I think lots of people were put off by the title,' recalls Klyce. 'It sounded... bloody. The opening weekend was a disaster. I remember getting a phone call from David – "We've had a terrible opening weekend!" he screamed at me down the phone. But now it feels great to know that ten years on people are still actually interested. I'm very proud to have been involved in the movie.'

At first Klyce says he didn't now quite how to approach the *Fight Club* job, but he was ultimately inspired by the screenplay of Chuck Palahniuk. 'The things that man writes are just incredible. If you analyse the words and take them in, the sound (design) starts to come out of that; the things Tyler says about being lost and emasculated and not having any purpose in life. The meaninglessness of life and the cacophony of the city inspired the design.' Listen to the track carefully and you'll hear the distinctive, once-common whine of the late '90s modern sound layered in. 'It's a little earmark of where we were when we made the film.'

Of course, at the heart of the movie is the skin-on-skin violence. 'The fights were tiered differently,' Klyce tells me. 'The very first time Tyler gets punched it's very innocuous – the way that actual fights sound. If you ever try and record someone fighting there's no noise, just a lot of breathing. Hollywood



Fight Club's deliberately contrasted visuals still look contemporary 10 years after it first appeared



has created an expectation of what a fight has got to sound like. So we build it up in stages. As the film builds up and the characters become more empowered, the sounds become huge. In the Angel Face fight, Chuck Palahniuk's words and the audio are equal to each other. So as Jack pummels Angel Face, destroying his beautiful looks, the sound is ridiculously over-amplified.' Interestingly, the brutal Angel Face sequence as we know it now was originally conceived as something quite different...

'It was originally edited to a piece of music,' I'm told. 'It was great, but there was something about it that was kind of playful and sexy. The violence was almost erotic. It took away its message, the anger. So when we were mixing the scene I decided to get rid of the music. When you get rid of the music you could hear the voice of the narrator. Then I decided to take the sound of the crowd yelling, which I slowed down and speeded up, and this put focus back on the scene.'

As for the fisticuffs themselves, a variety of sources were used. 'We recorded ourselves hitting our own bodies, then **we took a chicken carcass and stuffed it with walnuts and hit that**, finally we took slabs of meat into George Lucas' basement at Skywalker Ranch and slapped them around. And then we layered all those noises together.'

'I very much wanted to create new sounds for every scene. I had a lot of good people recording things. We would drive down the road and record the road bumps as we went over them; a friend of mine has a tree-trimming business and a fantastic collection of trucks. So I got him to honk his horn, and so on.'

In the Blu corner

As befits the movie, the Blu-ray release features a neat interactive extra in the shape of a Sound Mixing Studio. When users select *A Hit In The Ear: Ren Klyce and the Sound Design of Fight Club* from the extra menu, they have the option to watch and then 'remix' four key sequences from the film: *Welcome To Fight Club*, *Angel Face's Beating*, *The Crash* and *Kudzu Vine Speech*. Each mixing session allows users to rebalance between Real World (realistic audio) and Jack's POV (more expressionistic audio). It's a cute feature – but don't try this in bitstream mode, it only works with LPCM.

There's a Tyler Durden quote in the movie that seems strangely appropriate: 'The things you own end up owning you.' Somehow I think that'll resonate with AV fans all over, as they unpack their *Fight Club* Blu-ray and edge the volume up on their AVR.

'Blu-ray is the perfect home for *Fight Club*,' enthuses the sound designer. 'It allows you to come in at any moment and study what David has put in. It's also the perfect movie to enjoy in short little bursts. It's found the right medium eventually. Finally you can watch *Fight Club* as if you're at the cinema' ●

Sound choice

Ren Klyce picks his Top Five movie soundtracks

The Conversation
(Francis Ford Coppola, 1974):



'This has got to be at the top of my list for so many reasons...'

THX 1138
(George Lucas, 1971):

'This is just fantastic!'

There Will be blood
(Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007):

'I love the sound of this movie...'

Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope
(George Lucas, 1977)

Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back
(George Lucas, 1980):

'In terms of innovation, these films are outstanding. What (sound designer) Ben Burt did on them made them milestone films...'

Sound choices:
The Fight Club Blu-ray comes with an audio mixer as an interactive extra



Joining the Net set



Martin Pipe compares the interactive portals of four big-brand TV manufacturers to find out who's online technology is on top of the world

A decade ago, a handful of consumer-electronics manufacturers tried something quite radical – they built a simple web-browser into a TV. The logic was that it would bring the online world to those who were scared of computers. Fine idea in theory, but users were understandably put off by the dial-up charges and slow speeds. Internet TVs disappeared shortly thereafter.

Today, though, the internet is in a far more mature state. Broadband access is the norm, and its potential speeds make all kinds of interesting applications possible – including video streaming, radio and interactive services. And now some of these can be accessed by a new generation of hi-tech superscreens, with Panasonic, Sony, Philips and Samsung each incorporating web-access and networking into their flagship sets. However, as each brand's take on internet TV is different, varying enormously in the services that are offered, it's hard for the discerning telly-buyer to decide which service is best. Until now, that is...>

Viera Cast – Panasonic

As found on: TX-L37V10 (£900)

Connection: Ethernet-only

Networked media player: Yes – video/photos only

Overall rating: **1 2 3 4 5**

Panasonic's online offering, dubbed Viera Cast, is accessed by a dedicated button on the TV's handset. Press this, and you're taken to a neatly-designed portal. The content currently on offer is rather limited – indeed, even with all available sources onscreen there's still space for a 'coming soon' message. Of course, Panasonic told HCC it hopes to add more content, but there's no actual timeline.



Top: The L37V10 features a DLNA media player

Middle: The weather in

Panasonic's home country

Bottom: The VieraCast portal

Sport's day: Eurosport provides regularly updated video clips

A Eurosport section provides a selection of sports-related news clips, while those with an interest in all things German can try out ARD's Tagesschau ('A Look at the Day') news section.

YouTube gives you access to a massive variety of searchable footage. This option first made an appearance on Panasonic's high-end Blu-ray recorders, alongside the Picasa online photo-album, which is also offered here. The only other non-video content available comprises the Bloomberg business portal (which allows you to search for a specific stock) and worldwide weather forecasts with satellite maps.

For some video content – currently Eurosport – thumbnail shortcuts are provided on the homepage for up to three of a provider's most popular clips. It's also possible to display these streaming clips full-screen, although the quality is somewhat on the ropery side. In addition, access times can be slow – loading the VieraCast homepage itself can take half a minute.

The L37V10 LCD TV also carries an SD card viewer for photos (complete with slideshow) and video (MPEG-2 standard-def and AVCHD). On top of this is a responsive DLNA-compliant networked media player, which is compatible with video (MPEG-2/DivX/XviD) and photos, but not music. The odd thing is that you can hear the MP3 sound associated with many DivX files – and so the codec is obviously supported. So why can't you play MP3 tunes? Baffling.



Top and middle: Use the 32PFL9604H's in-built web browser to go wherever you want online

Bottom: Browsing the Picasa photo sharing site

Net TV – Philips

As found on: 32PFL9604H (£800)

Connection: Wi-Fi or Ethernet

Networked media player: Yes – video, audio and photos

Overall rating: **1 2 3 4 5**

Select the Net TV option on the Philips 32PFL9604H's main menu and you're transported into an audiovisual world that no-one would have predicted until recently. The first thing you'll see is a Philips-managed thumbnail menu screen that, although not as pretty as that of the Panasonic, already offers more content.

Most notable is the inclusion of Tunin.fm, a launchpad to a wide selection of 'net radio stations covering just about every conceivable genre. Pity you can't turn the display off when listening, though. Like Panasonic and Samsung, Philips provides YouTube and Picasa access – and like its rivals, you can't do anything about the poor picture quality. However, Philips also provides alternatives to YouTube and Picasa in the forms of Dailymotion and Myalbum.com respectively.



And there's more: Screendreams might tickle your fancy if onscreen wallpaper is what you're after; weather forecasting is catered for by the MeteoConsult service; and games fans can explore Funspot. If you're expecting PS3-style complexity from the latter, though, forget it; 4-in-a-row, Blockbuster, Sudoku and Blackjack give you some idea of the limitations.

Now that's the sum total of what Net TV makes available to UK users, but if you change your location to 'Netherlands' in the setup menu (where Philips is based), page upon page of Dutch applications are shown. These range from a PSV Eindhoven (football club) portal to a train ticket-booker, giving you some idea of what can be expected should Net TV ever take off here. If it doesn't, though, the set's Opera web browser can visit any site of interest. Entering URLs is a bit of a pain (I'd kill for a wireless keyboard/mouse)

and although complex sites like the BBC's display properly, they are pretty slow to load. Actually, even accessing the Net TV homepage can involve seemingly-glacial timescales. Overall, though, Philips' online serving is excellent, far exceeds its rivals and suggests what's possible in the future.

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Internet@TV – Samsung

As found on: LE40B650 (£700)

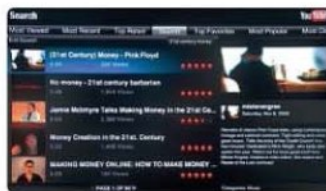
Connection: Ethernet or Wi-Fi (with dongle)

Networked media player: Yes – video, audio and photos

Overall rating: **1 2 3 4 5**

TV market-leader Samsung was one of the first setmakers to harness the potential of broadband. Does that mean it's ahead of the competition? Not necessarily...

As with the other TVs here, access to online content is a button-press away. A row of banners then slides into view at the bottom of the screen. Each selects one of the Samsung 'widgets' as these applications are known. The difference between these and the Philips and Panasonic sets is that the basic widgets reside in the TV's memory. This makes access faster, because only the data has to be downloaded. The penalty is that you may have to delete existing widgets in



order to make space for new ones – there is only space for 13 at present.

A cool feature of Samsung's Internet@TV is the option of creating profiles for different family members, so everyone can call up their own widget collections.

Pre-installed on our review TV (an LE40B650) were widgets providing access to Flickr photo albums, and stylish-looking news, weather and finance portals. The latter content is the fruit of a partnership between Samsung and online behemoth Yahoo!

Additional widgets, which are installed from a gallery, include a fully-featured YouTube browser with fullscreen playback (the only video widget at present); a horoscope; Texas Hold 'em; Sudoku; Quizmaster; USA Today Sports (good for baseball and American football fans); and a TV Guide. The latter is US-only and won't provide listings for the UK, so it's completely and utterly pointless. The likes of Stephen Fry and Lily Allen will be overjoyed to know that a Twitter widget has recently been added.

The LE40B650 also boasts a DLNA-compliant networked media player with support for a wide range of codecs and formats, including DivX/XviD, H.264, MKV, MPEG-2, MP3, WMA and JPEG. Playback from USB storage devices is also catered for. Samsung gets full marks for listing the available servers alongside the AV inputs in the 'source list' – however, I experienced nothing but trouble getting the thing to access files stored on my server. I could see them, but more often than not selection resulted in a refusal to play. Samsung's own Windows server software (PC Share Manager) was more of a hindrance than a help, with its nonsensical 'can only share folder items' messages that flummoxed even Samsung's support line.

Main picture: Samsung's widgets slide along the bottom of the screen when requested

Left (top to bottom): Searching for comedy cat vids on YouTube; browsing media files stored on a PC; bringing up the Horoscope widget during a BBC ident

'A Facebook widget isn't out of the question'

Samsung's Darren Petersen tells us what he's allowed to about Internet@TV

What new widgets are on the way from Samsung? How about BBC iPlayer, 4oD, etc?

We can't give you any info on widgets that we are working on behind the scenes, but, as you say, premium VoD services will certainly raise the awareness of the platform and help bring this exciting technology to the masses.

Do you have plans for Pay services?

Going forward, we will be looking to support many types of widgets – including commercial ones.

Could third parties create their own widgets, iPhone-app style?

No. This is a premium service and will be populated by premium content. Samsung will pick and choose content partners we feel fit with our brand and our products. Currently we only issue our SDK (Software Development Kit) to content providers we are looking to work with. That's not to say that we won't open this up as it matures.

Widgets can take some time to load – how

complex can they get without slowing down the system too much? For example, might we see Facebook?

For 2009, it's safe to say the current platform isn't lightning-quick (Rome wasn't built in a day!). You can expect a speedier user experience next year. A Facebook widget is certainly not out of the question.

How many widgets can be installed on a Samsung TV at any one time?

This year you can have a maximum

of 13 at any one time, but the user is free to add and delete services at will within that constraint.

Is there an industry-wide standard for widgets and net connectivity?

There are some industry standards in development. We rely on common technology standards such as XML and JavaScript. I can't comment on what other manufacturers are doing, but my guess is that we are all using similar systems. If content providers decide to build a widget, it will more or less be able to work with most of the big CE brands.

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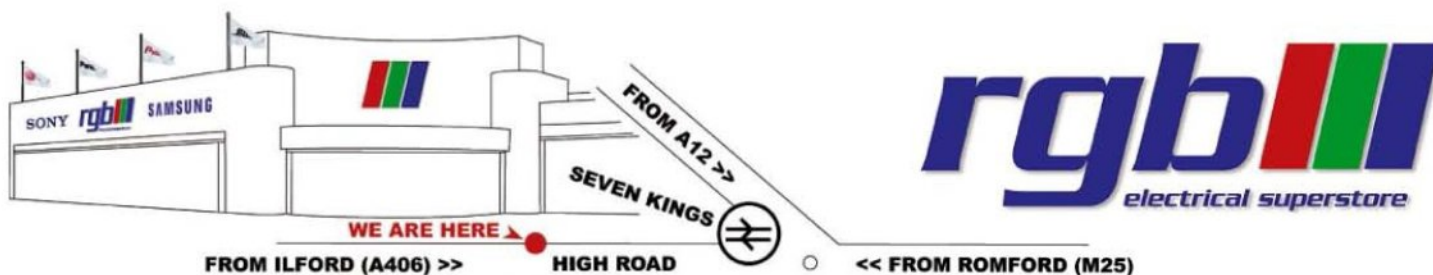
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Parking for 150 Vehicles



Top: Changing the RSS settings isn't a very user-friendly experience

Middle: Using Sony's alarm clock widget

Bottom: The KDL-40V5500's ability to play networked media files makes up for the limited interactive services

AppliCast – Sony

As found on: KDL-40V5500 (£700)

Connection: Wired Ethernet only

Networked media player: Yes – video, audio and photos

Overall rating: **1 2 3 4 5**

Like the other portals here – with the exception of Philips' net-browsing version – Sony's AppliCast takes the walled garden approach. In other words, Sony and its content partners provide the services. This gives the manufacturer control over what's offered, and ensures that everything available is geared up for the display and the technology that lurks behind it.

The KDL-40V5500's attractive menu system, which borrows heavily from the PlayStation games console, has a Network option from which the various AppliCast widgets are available. Unfortunately, the current choices are few and dull. There's a calculator, calendar, alarm clock and world clock – all of which can be displayed alongside the TV picture. The only truly online content comprises the ability to select photos for download and display – a feature known as Picture Frame Online – and access to RSS newsfeeds. Some of the photos available on Picture Frame Online – which is organised by theme – are truly magnificent and show off the 40V5500's 1080p screen to good effect.

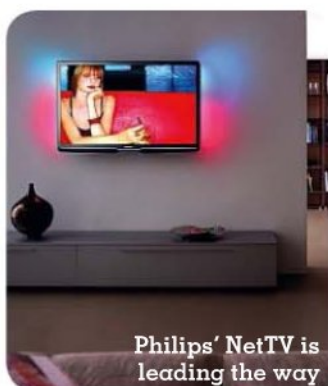
By default, the RSS feature displays Sony-related TV news. Strange. However, the URL of this feed can be laboriously changed to something more interesting with an onscreen keyboard (no bookmarks, though). You're informed if new widgets are available, but over a period of several weeks I certainly couldn't find any additions. This is a pity, because the KDL-40V5500 can handle up to 30 of them. As with the Samsung, widgets are downloaded to the TV; only the associated data is acquired online when needed.

Next year, Sony's interactive service will be expanded so it's more in line with what's currently offered by the competition. For instance, while it's the only platform here not to offer YouTube, Sony has confirmed it will be added in 2010, when the brand launches Bravia Internet TV, a revamped version of AppliCast. On-demand content from Five is also coming. But by then its rivals will probably have moved on, too – and at the moment, it's definitely the weakest 'net TV offering.

Making up for the content-lite AppliCast, Sony's KDL-40V5500 has a DLNA-certified networked media player (USB is provided as an alternative). The downside is that the choice of formats and codecs is limited. AVCHD, HDV, MPEG-2, JPEG and MP3 may be supported, but its incompatibility with DivX/XviD is somewhat unforgivable.



Clockwatcher: If you need to know the time in Alaska whilst watching *Masterchef* then Sony has a widget to help



Philips' NetTV is leading the way

Conclusion

All of these brand's online portals are easy to use and have something unique to offer, although Sony's AppliCast is the most disappointing of the bunch. It doesn't match the services provided by Samsung – which employs very similar technology to offer some useful widgets – nor is it as fast, slick or intuitive. Panasonic offers some unique content – sports fans and stock-market players will appreciate Eurosport and Bloomberg – but it's still quite limited.

Philips' Net TV currently has the biggest potential. And for now, Net TV is the only app

to offer 'net radio and an escape route from the walled garden, courtesy of its Opera web browser. In that respect, it's streets ahead of the competition.

Bring on VoD

It's unfortunate that none of these brands yet provide access to popular VOD services like BBC iPlayer. As soon as such services are added – and it's only a matter of time – the appeal of 'net-enabled tellies will soar. In fact, HCC is confident that IPTV will one day become the norm, appearing alongside TV channels in the EPG ●

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Team HCC celebrates a Hollywood heavyweight

The imaginator

Angel delight:

Cameron has also dabbled in TV, producing the Jessica Alba sci-fi show *Dark Angel*



He's been called a megalomaniac and an egotist, and accused of making the lives of those working with him miserable. But he's also the mastermind behind some of the most successful cinematic blockbusters of the past 25 years, with his efforts behind the camera on a mere six films trousering US box office returns of over \$1billion. Now he's about to unleash his first feature film in 12 years. Welcome back James Cameron.

The Canadian born director is beloved of home cinema fans, thanks in part to his 80s double whammy of *Terminator* and *Aliens* – films which fused sci-fi with hardcore violence and popcorn thrills in a way that hadn't been done before. But he's not all about guns and nuclear explosions: his work as a director has clearly been infused by his early career in SFX. This is a man who seems completely obsessed with the latest tech developments, the visionary who introduced the wonders of CG visual FX and 'morphing' technology through *The Abyss* and *Terminator 2*, and whose forthcoming movie *Avatar* has become the poster boy for a new era of 3D cinema.

It was over 30 years ago that Cameron, inspired by *Star Wars*, decided to quit his job as a truck

driver and take the leap into the film industry. Like Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and Jonathan Demme before him, Cameron's first real taste of Hollywood came with a job working for low-budget filmmaker Roger Corman.

Starting in the special FX department, before progressing to art director on *Battle Beyond the Stars*, Cameron's first big break came when the original director left *Piranha II: The Spawning*, allowing him to take the reins. The shoot itself was a disaster (as was the resulting film), but it's during this time that claims he had a nightmare about a robot hitman sent from the future to kill him – a concept he turned into *The Terminator*. This led to a scripting assignment on *First Blood Part II*, and he's never looked back since, crafting blockbuster after blockbuster, raking in hundreds of millions in box office takings along the way.

Yet, after 1997's *Titanic*, Cameron withdrew from mainstream Hollywood, preferring to noodle around at the bottom of the Atlantic making 3D IMAX documentaries. Had he fallen out of love with cinema? Nah – he was simply developing the technology that would enable him to bring a new 3D spectacular to the multiplexes, and satiate the appetite of home cinema fans around the world ●

Quintessential Cameron... *The Abyss* introduces the world to CG 'morphing'



1 Water surprise

The crew of the underwater oil platform come face-to-face with a mysterious visitor



2 Mirror image

The watery tentacle then attempts to communicate with them by replicating their facial expressions



3 Poker face

As well as seamlessly 'morphing' between faces, the groundbreaking CG creation also reacts to touch



4 Very very tasty

While the entire sequence only lasts for about 75 seconds, it took ILM eight months to complete

Must own...



Strange Days

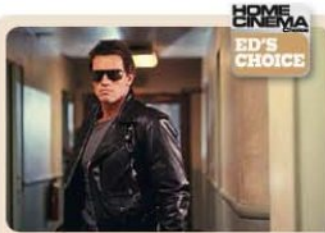
Universal Pictures → Region 2 DVD
£6 Approx

Before immersing himself in *Titanic*'s pre-production, James Cameron wrote and produced this fast-paced cyberpunk thriller for director, and ex-wife, Kathryn Bigelow.

00.01: This POV 'clip' sequence puts the dialogue in the rear channels. Weird and highly effective.

17.19: In the future, TV's are still 4:3!

120.22: The NYE street party scenes are dazzling – tons of extras, a heavy metal soundtrack and helicopters swirling around the 5.1 soundscape.



The Terminator

MGM → R2 Definitive Edition DVD
£13 Approx

Cameron's breakthrough flick cost \$6m to make yet grossed ten times that amount. A lean gritty sci-fi slasher and still the best entry in the franchise.

01.44: The opening credit sequence, complete with Brad Fiedel's now-famous synth score, screams sci-fi B-movie!

57.10: 'I'll be back.' With these words a Hollywood star was born.

87.13: The T101's endoskeleton rises from the flames. Some of the stop-motion FX now looks a bit ropery.



Aliens

Twentieth Century Fox → R2 Special Edition DVD → £23 Approx

Cameron's sequel stripped away the horror elements of Ridley Scott's original and replaced them with space marines and machine-gun fire.

25.00: The exterior ships-in-space shots look surprisingly cheap. Obviously Cameron spent his budget elsewhere...

137.40: ... such as this gory scene where Bishop (Lance Henriksen) is cleaved in two by the Queen Alien.

139.55: 'Get away from her, you bitch.' Ripley kicks ass in one of cinema's best-loved cat-fights.



The Abyss

Twentieth Century Fox → R2 Special Edition DVD → £18 Approx

When Cameron finally discovered CGI, he tested it out in this underrated subterranean sci-fi-disaster-drama.

23.19: The non-anamorphic picture is washed out and soft. How long will we have to wait for a Blu-ray version?

81.40: The first appearance of the CG water beastie made us all sit up and take notice in 1989.

146.52: In the Director's Cut, the underwater aliens threaten to wipe out humanity with tidal waves until Ed Harris persuades them otherwise. Odd.

Worth seeing...



Rambo – First Blood Part II

Momentum Pictures
R2 DVD Boxset → £33 Approx

Cameron and Sylvester Stallone co-wrote this sequel, which took the troubled Vietnam vet from *First Blood* and turned him into an all-action icon.

00.18: The DVD picture is surprisingly sharp for a film over 25 years old.

02.59: 'Do we get to win this time?' Amidst a slew of 1980s anti-war flicks, *Rambo II* stands proud.

57.17: Typical Cameron: a gun-packed chase sequence replete with choppers, heavily-armed soldiers and a feisty girl.



True Lies

Universal Pictures → R2 DVD
£10 Approx

Schwarzenegger as a James Bond-style spy sounded great – until it turned out to be a comedy, with incompetent Arab terrorists and that guy from *Roseanne*. The action set pieces make it worth watching, though.

33.26: Cameron has fun with a horse vs motorbike chase. The bike wins, but only because the horse refuses to jump off a building.

108.33: Fighter jets, a limousine, a helicopter (again) and a Florida Keys road bridge star in this explosive stunt.



Terminator 2: Judgement Day

Optimum → Region B BD Skynet Edition → £25 Approx

The definitive home cinema movie, *T2* ramps up the action and spectacle, as Arnie's do-gooding cyborg travels back to 1991 to save John Connor from Robert Patrick's shape-changing nasty.

35.17: The storm-drain chase delivers hi-octane action, brutal DTS-HD sonics, and plenty of vehicular destruction.

125.33: 'I know now why you cry... But it is something I can never do.' Cameron caps *T2*'s epic finale with a moment of mawkish sentiment. Boo!



Titanic

20th Century Fox → R2 Four-Disc Collector's Ed DVD → £25 Approx

This box-office smash has epic scale, fabulous production values and mesmerising SFX. A shame, then, that it's a pile of overlong soppy garbage with an irritating soundtrack.

20.37: After an opening act set in the present day set, Cameron transports us back to Southampton, 1912. The ship here is CG, but a 40ft long scale model was also built.

94.47: 'Oiceberg! Right ahead!' Finally, after 90 minutes, the movie kicks into gear.

Cinema with a licence to thrill



In the same way that film makers go to great lengths to create spectacular, unforgettable movies, DSE invests all of its effort and expertise to ensure that your new home cinema is a sure-fire blockbuster.

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INSTALLS

→ **Smarthome highlights** **PEERLESS** Ultra-thin wall-mounts made to match the latest in size zero flatscreens **LUTRON** Designer black-out blinds with eco-friendly credentials **MERIDIAN** Next-generation music server **SHED HEAVEN!** Take a tour of a stunning DIY cinema at the bottom of a garden **CERTIFIED AV-HOLIC!** An *HCC* reader guides you through his home theatre setup

Popcorn palace

The kind of cinema room that's worth celebrating... p44



Hang-on-the-wall heaven!

If you're wall-hanging as part of your install, you'll need an ultra-thin mounting system

When you're talking custom installation home cinema, one thing you have to get right before you start is the positioning of your flat TV or projector screen. Plus, if you've opted for a panel over PJ, and you're serious about replicating the cinematic experience in your home, wall-mounting is a must.

An immediate problem, though, is that the majority of available wall-mount options compromise the slim nature of today's displays by effectively adding several centimetres to the thickness of the screen when it's fixed to the wall. This is understandable – the mount itself has to sit behind the TV, with all its fixings – but galling when you consider just how thin modern screens have become. New offerings from brands like Sony, Panasonic and Samsung are thinner than 30mm.

US brand Peerless reckons it's come up with a solution. Its SlimLine range of ultra-thin mounts maintain the design flair of contemporary TVs by adding as little as 8.4mm to the screen depth. Peerless boasts that its SlimLine product is the world's thinnest flatpanel mounting solution. 'We live in a time when bigger is better and thinner is the winner,' quips Adam Molberger, product manager for Peerless' flatpanel mounts, .

Now Peerless has added a new range of articulating and tilting SlimLine wall-mounts, providing further flexibility to end-users and installers alike – and HCC has had a preview.

Just swivel

The 'articulating' SLWS250 and SLWS350 are intended for 32-46in and 37-56in screens, and cost around £250 and £300 respectively. The arms on both mounts retract to less than 30mm and extend to 604mm on the SLWS250 and



734mm on the SLWS350. This allows full, 180-degree movement (90 degrees left and right), enabling viewing angles to be perfected.

Peerless's SLWS220 and SLWS320 tilting mounts position screens 17mm from the wall, with full-motion tilt of +17.5 and -5 degrees. Screen adapters hook on to the wall-plate for installation. The SLWS220 extends up to 149mm from the wall, allowing access to the back of the screen, with the SLWS320 extending up to 140mm. Other key features include +/-5 degrees of roll to allow for horizontal levelling of the screen, and tool-free adjustment of +15/-5 degrees.

The SlimLine range is already getting support from some installers. Sevenoaks Swindon franchisee Trevor Farrell told HCC: 'They are the thinnest products on the market and create the most discrete installations; and they are incredibly quick and easy to fit.'

Line up: Using a tilting wall-mount means you can get your flatscreen perfectly lined up with your viewing position

Escient control for Pronto



D&M Installation Europe has introduced a free IP control module for the bi-directional control of Escient Vision media players via Marantz RC9001, Philips TSU9600 and TSU9800 Pronto touch-screen control handsets. Downloadable free of charge from www.escient.co.uk, the module enables the intuitive and user-friendly Escient Vision onscreen display GUI interface on each of the handsets – so you don't even have to switch on your TV or projector to set up the system. We featured the Escient Zone – an integrated CI home control platform – in HCC #175.

Blind faith



Lighting supremo Lutron likes to keep light out, too. Its new designer blind collections – the Gallery and Classico – boast wide selections of sustainable, PVC-free and fire safe fabrics, with a choice of colours. Among the ranges featured within The Gallery collection are Dim-out and Burnout, offering dim-out and sheer fabrics in a selection of versatile designs. The Classico collection has been created with a more corporate design scheme in mind and includes blackout, dim-out and sheer ranges. Additionally, there are also Greenguard and Oeko-Tex-certified ranges within the Classico collection, aimed at the environmentally conscious customer.

Taking charge



Crestron has launched its first MPC (Media Presentation Controller) unit with a programmable LCD front panel. The MPC-M5 joins Crestron's family of AV room controllers, and features a built-in 2-Series control system, which fits onto a standard three-gang electrical box. Its LCD display has four 'soft' and seven 'hard' key buttons with LED feedback – all fully-programmable for commanding system functions such as power, source, transport control, audio and lighting. The MPC-M50 has customisable backlit labelling and wireless remote capability. It's available in black and white and mounts in a wall or podium. Prices from your local installer.

Sooloos revamped



Meridian's new Sooloos music server – the Sooloos 2.0 – boasts a host of improvements and additions from simple interface enhancements to major changes in system capabilities, zone playback and hardware options. It requires fewer components, too. A Control 10 can now be combined with a Twinstore alone to create a full-on music system. Says Bob Stuart, Meridian's co-founder: 'The new design allows the interface to handle hundreds of thousands of files with the same speed and flexibility as just 100 – a critical point when considering online and other media types.' £7,000, plus installation, bags you this classy system.



X-Men Origins: Wolverine Motion Picture © 2009 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

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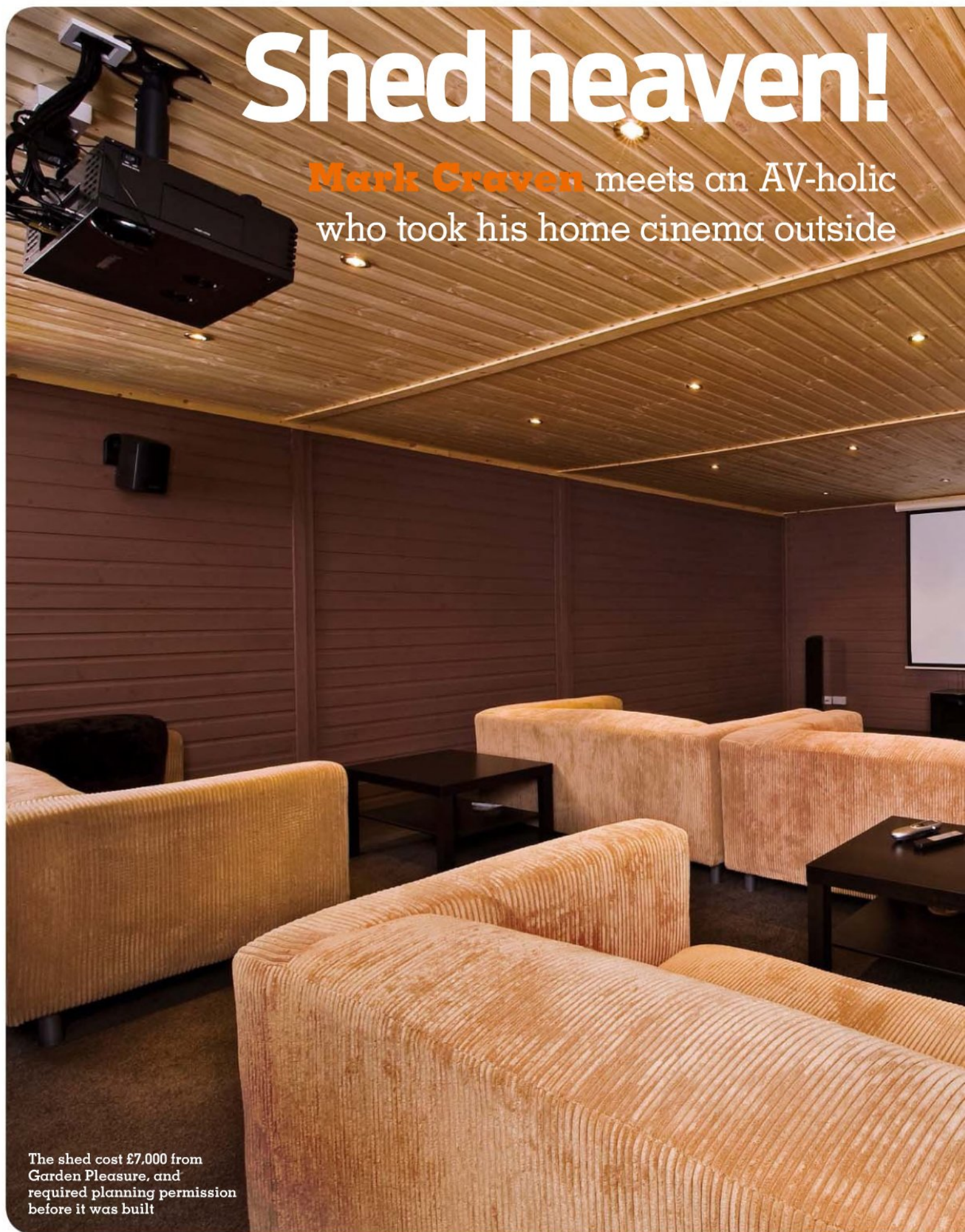
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Shed heaven!

Mark Craven meets an AV-holic who took his home cinema outside



The shed cost £7,000 from Garden Pleasure, and required planning permission before it was built

→Kit Checklist

Panasonic: PT-AE3000 projector

Mission: E5 7.1 surround speakers

Ebay: 119in electric screen, unbranded, £110 brand-new from the internet auction site

Onkyo: TX-SR876 AVR

Sony: PlayStation 3, US model for Region A discs

Sony: S350 Blu-ray player for Region B discs

Hauppauge: HD-PVR

Sky: HD set-top box

Toshiba: EP35 HD DVD player

Self-built home-theatre PC

Microsoft: Xbox 360 console

Harmony: 890 remote

Onkyo: iPod dock

Garden Pleasure: Shed

The owner of this awe-inspiring garden cinema originally contacted *HCC* as an AV-holic. Yet, having browsed through the images he sent in, we decided this install deserved more space. A 7.1 bigscreen movie theatre with PC and console gaming, multiple HD sources, mini fridge and plenty of legroom, all fitted inside a shed? That's not something we see every day.

Named 'Reelwood' by its proud owner PJ, this wooden wonder is the result of two months hard work, constant tweaking, bargain-hunting and, as often happens, the need for more space. PJ explains...

'My living room used to be the home cinema but that was all it was. Everything pointed towards the screen. It was hard to have a conversation and it wasn't very sociable. When my girlfriend moved in we came to the agreement that the home cinema had to be moved so we could have a 'normal' living room. She suggested building it into a shed at the bottom of the garden so the sound wouldn't be an issue and I could have movie nights with my friends, 'til whatever time in the morning, without disturbing the house. Initially I was worried I was going to end up with a portable TV in a shack...'

The clearing and construction of the shed, and installation of the electronics, began in mid-April and was finished by the middle of July. Now it's complete, is there anything PJ wishes he'd done differently? No, is the emphatic answer.

'It's great. Bigger and better than I imagined it would be. The only thing I could have added was professional soundproofing, but the >



PJ relaxes outside his home cinema with a copy of his favourite mag

42 INSTALL

cost would have been astronomical. As it is, you can only feel a slight rumble from outside, so it all worked out for the best.'

Of course, even though the major build is over, there are things that can be fiddled with.

'I'm still having fun making minor adjustments,' admits PJ. 'I haven't stopped yet!'

Taking a tour of Reelwood proves what a devoted AV-holic PJ is. There's *Star Wars* memorabilia in the lobby, a Hauppauge HD PVR for archiving Sky HD material, an imported US PlayStation 3 for spinning Region A Blu-rays, a home-built media centre PC... and a 119in electric projector screen snaffled for the bargain price of £110.

'It's completely unbranded. It honestly has no lettering on it whatsoever. I got it off eBay brand-new, so I'm guessing it's Chinese-made.'

With a 26ft x 22ft area to work with, there was no chance of not going down the projector route, says PJ, who explains the benefits. 'You can't beat it for size, flexibility and scope. The only flatscreen to come close was the 103in Panasonic but that's still not as big and costs £50,000! If you have the space and the right conditions a projector is a no-brainer.'

AV dream

The cinema gets a lot of use, despite being at the bottom of the garden. PJ's girlfriend loves the way it makes movies and get-togethers a real event ('they just wish I would turn it down a bit'), and every Sunday they have friends round, order some takeaway food and watch a movie or two. In fact, PJ estimates they watch four or more films a week on the system, plus all the latest HD shows.

With that kind of AV-geek lifestyle, you'd be forgiven for thinking PJ was ready to relax a bit and enjoy the fruits of his labours, but he isn't resting on his laurels. He's already considering adding a 9.2-channel amp – or even a 3D projector.

'I was lucky enough to see Panasonic's Full HD 3D demo at a recent expo,' says the AV addict. 'I've always been a supporter of 3D and am glad it's finally moving towards mainstream and shying away from anaglyph in the home. I'll definitely be adding 3D to my kit sooner rather than later.'

Sooner please. Then we have an excuse to pop back to his cinematic cabin for another jealous look ●



A Get the picture

The owner first bought an HD projector in 2002, and currently uses a Panasonic PT-AE3000 – although this might have to make way for a 3D-capable PJ in the near future

B Set brain to 'Off'

Out of the sizable software collection (1810 discs and counting), it's the *Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen* Blu-ray that is getting the most playback – because it's 'perfect for testing the system and not having to think for a few hours'.

C Thrill-seeker

Hi-def gaming is a big part of PJ's home cinema experience:



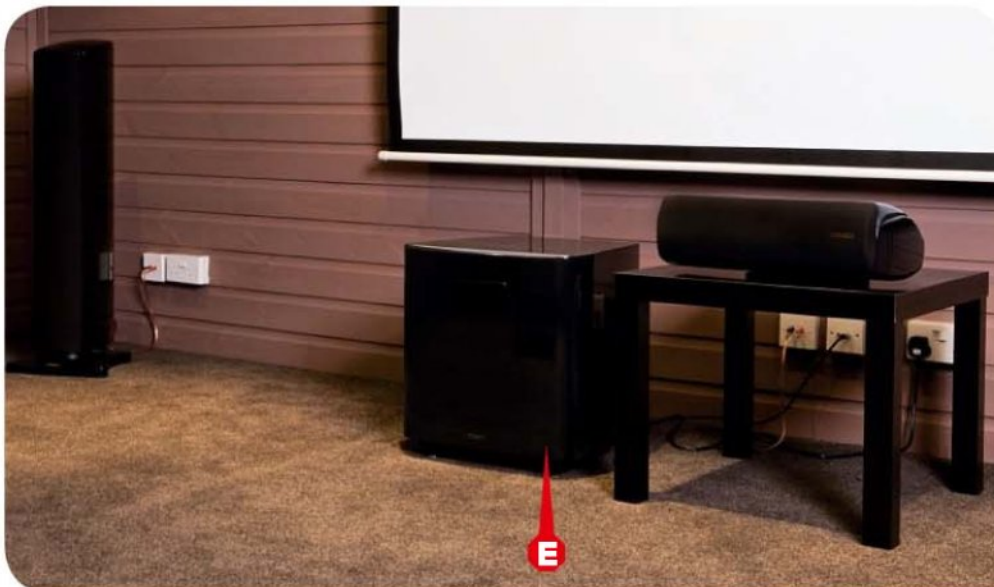
'There's nothing more exciting than going flat-out over a cliff edge in *Burnout Paradise* on a 119in screen at full volume'

D Goin' Solo

No home theatre is complete without some movie memorabilia – and these *Star Wars* standees also hide PJ's extra speaker wire, collection of screwdrivers, and kettle

E Serious soundfield

The combination of a 7.1 Mission E5 speaker system and 7.1-channel Onkyo TX-SR876 AVR gets the most from BD soundtracks



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All installations by Musical Images

Anton van Beek visits a lavish smarthome with a luxury cinema room

This spectacular bigscreen theatre is the centrepiece of a major smarthome project recently completed by York-based pro-installers iHomes.

The lucky owner has funded a redevelopment of the entire property, including the addition of what's described as an 'entertainment wing'. This features a ground floor given over to a games room – complete with pool table, bar and Pac-Man machine – and conservatory, and this dedicated movie room on the first floor.

The brief to iHomes was to create a cinema with 'wow factor' – and we reckon it's succeeded; the ten-seat room is a feast for the eyes even before the kit kicks into life. Matching the curve of the leather seating is a floating ceiling feature that utilises more than 500 multi-colour fibre optics, giving the room a real touch of bling.

Keeping in touch

This attention to detail is evident throughout the project, not least in the specified AV kit and the way in which content from the client's extensive DVD collection and iTunes library can be streamed all around the house. iHomes even integrated a mic into the Elan audio-switching system, allowing the owners to hear if their baby daughter wakes up while they're using the movie den – something that couldn't be achieved with traditional baby monitors, due to the distance.

'They interpreted my brief exactly and even added a few extra sparkles along the way,' says the cinema room's delighted owner, 'All my family use the system constantly, it has been faultless!' ●

Hi-tech house



Groovy baby: The ten-seat cinema mixes cutting-edge AV with designer looks



→ Kit Checklist

Cinema room

Runco: RS-440 projector

Vutec: Vu-Easy 103in screen

Elan: 3 x THP650W Theatre Point front L/R/C in-wall speakers; 2 x THP650SS Theatre Point on-wall dipoles; 2 x THP802C Theatre Point in-ceiling rear speakers; THP1200SW Theatre Point subwoofer

Elan: 1 x 10in table-top Via! Valet touchscreen

Sony: PlayStation 3 console

Microsoft: Xbox 36 console

iHomes: Blackout blinds with Somfy motors; ceiling feature with blue LEDs and black velour

Rako: Lighting system

Rack

Elan: System 12 12-source, 8-zone AV switch; D1200 12-channel digital amplifier; D400 4-channel digital amplifier; V883 component video switcher; COM2 communications controller; SS1 system processor

Denon: TU1800DAB Tuner

Sky: 3 x Sky+HD boxes

Pioneer: BDP320 Blu-ray player

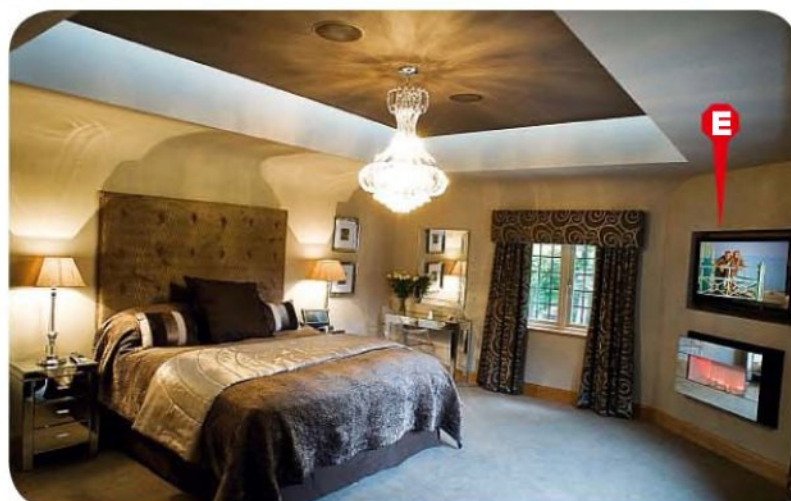
Escient: VS200 media server; VCI media client

Request: F4.1200 4-zone music server

Denon: AVR-4308

Genie: 4-channel digital video recorder

Oscon: Sequential start power distribution unit



Room essentials

A Boom Boom Pow!

Room-shaking bass is provided by this 12in active subwoofer with 300W Class-D digital amplification

B Invisible sound

Hidden behind the acoustically-transparent 103in projector screen is a trio of Elan in-wall speakers

C Mount up

The cinema room's Runco RS-440 projector is mounted using Future Automation's award-winning PM1 system

D Living free(sat)

The living room boasts a Panasonic TH50-PZ81B with Freesat tuner, plus two Elan MP800C in-ceiling speakers

E Hi-def everywhere

Hi-def video is distributed to nine TVs throughout the home (including this Sony KDL37V4000U in the master bedroom) via the Elan HD video switcher

Certified: AV-holic!

Every issue, one **HCC reader** invites you to take a tour of their beloved home cinema setup...



Nice idea:
Our AV-holic used a £250 mains cable as a chat-up line

Introduce yourself...

I'm Mario Greppi, aged 28.

Are you an AV-holic?

Yes, I'm a self-confessed techno geek, more so than a movie buff! I spend more time reading about gear and following advances in equipment than I do actually watching films. This is mainly due to having kids now, though.

What's in your cinema setup?

Too much to list here! The main components are a Panasonic PT-AE3000 projector, 40in Samsung LCD TV, Rotel processor and power amp, Pioneer BDP-51FD Blu-ray deck, Bowers & Wilkins surrounds and a REL subwoofer, plus an Xbox 360 and a Playstation 3.

What's your newest buy?

My Bowers and Wilkins CM5s. I had been using Quad 21Ls but with the introduction of children into the room I could not bear the thought of the varnish getting trashed. The CM5s should stand some chance of survival... until the terrors can reach those Nautilus tweeters.

How much have you spent on your hobby over the years?

That is quite a scary thought. Not including any media, I would say around £40K. I also have a large CD and vinyl collection valued at around £20K and around £5K-worth in films. Not to mention my games collection.

What's your wife's take on your hobby?

She thinks I'm slightly mad, although when I put a film on she tries to hide the smile that says 'Wow'. One of the first conversations I ever had with her was about a £250 mains cable that I bought and how there must be something wrong with me. I ended up marrying her, so clearly she was correct.

What's your current fave disc?

If I had to choose a film to put in right now it would be *The Dark Knight*.

Are you excited about 3D?

Yes. Not in the form of having to wear those silly glasses, though. I have hardly any vision in my left eye so those glasses never work!●

Room essentials

A Projector power

Mario uses a Panasonic PT-AE3000 for his major movie sessions, but also has a 40in Samsung LCD for regular telly-watching

B Light fantastic

Little touches, like these variable mood lights, can give your home system a real high-end feel

C New addition

Our AV-holic has replaced a pair of Quad 21Ls with these Bowers & Wilkins cabinets. The rears and surrounds of the 7.1 system are also from B&W

D Deadly duo

Amplification and surround sound processing are handled by two separate Rotel components, one of which has an integrated full-colour screen for preview purposes

Join the club

Do you want to see your home cinema system featured in the pages of *Home Cinema Choice*? If so, just email your contact info and some large, hi-res photos of your setup to hcc@futurenet.co.uk with AV-Holic as the subject.

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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** SHARP 52in LED TV with local dimming tech
 PIONEER LX-branded Blu-ray deck with audio talents OPTOMA Full HD projector for less than £1,000
 TEUFEL World's first THX Select2 5.1 system ONKYO Networking AVR with height/width processing
 SONY Fully-featured BD player and entry-level 37in LCD GENELEC Active sub/sat system **AND MORE!**



5.1 showdown

HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

We put four affordable sub/sat systems though their paces to discover which is the king of stylish surround sound, p88

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRAISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT, IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Champion of light

Sharp brings LED tech to its affordable TV range. Blinding, says **Rik Henderson**

There's something exciting happening in the world of TVs. And it's not really what some analysts expected or predicted...

Some were guilty of being so giddy with excitement over the prospect of OLED TVs that they didn't expect LED backlighting to emerge as the saviour of flatpanel technology. But it has. In spades.

LED backlighting has, in the past year or so, improved the performance of LCD TVs so dramatically that you've got to wonder if there's even going to be a need for largescreen OLED panels at all. An LED-illuminated screen can offer a super-thin footprint, deep, involving black levels and a blisteringly vibrant colourfield – all of the promises attached to OLED technology – but, and this is the crunch, you can have them now. In traditional sizes.

In addition, with LED technology, the major manufacturers needn't spend billions creating new production lines from scratch, and can focus instead on adapting current ones. As a result, costs are minimised and prices remain reasonable. Everyone's a winner. Except plasma manufacturers, perhaps...

Ready for market

The LC52LE700E is Sharp's first affordable mass-market LED TV and very own prospective OLED-killer. While the company has dabbled with LED-backlighting before, with its super high-end XSIE range of screens, they cost two arms, a leg and half a lower intestine, so it's welcome to see the brand finally bringing its own form of the technology to the wider marketplace.

The cost reduction can partly be explained by the fact that the screen

features a backlight consisting of so-called UltraBrilliant white LEDs, rather than the RGB array used in the XSIE. These new LEDs, proprietary to Sharp, feature a unique 'double-dome' light amplifier lens for extreme high brightness and multi-fluorescents for improved colour fidelity. And by adopting a full array of LEDs distributed evenly behind a diffuser, the backlight has best-in-class uniformity.

Rival manufacturers, such as Sony and Samsung, have latterly adopted side-firing LED systems, allowing for even thinner screens, but risking issues with brightness uniformity.

Interestingly, the Sharp doesn't employ any local dimming. Another cost-cutting measure? Local dimming requires the LED bulbs to be individually driven depending on screen content. When areas of the screen are dark, the bulbs in that zone switch off (or dim). When brightness is called for, they shine brighter. It's a system that allows for both deep, bold blacks and bright, brash whites on the same image.

While this particular screen does have a full set of white LED bulbs behind the LCD panel, it doesn't switch off in zones. However, Sharp argues that its UltraBrilliant LED System has other plus points – it's capable of high brightness, and offers environmental benefits including longer life expectancy and lower power consumption.

The screen also debuts the brand's latest Full HD glass. Dubbed the X-Gen LCD Panel, it utilises a new pixel design that permits more light to pass through even while minimising light leakage.

Aesthetically, there are some ramifications of adopting a Full Array >



The LC52LE700E is part of a new breed of Sharp LCD TV

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES up to 1080p24
Digital TV tuner: YES and CI slot
HDMI: YES 4 x HDMI v1.3
Component: YES 1 input
PC input: YES 1 x VGA
Sound: 2 x 10W
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Brightness (claimed): 450cd/m²
Contrast ratio (claimed): Mega(!)
Mega(!)

Dimensions (w/o stand) mm: 1,238(w) x 765(h) x 95(d)
Weight (w/o stand): 22.5kg
Features: X-Gen panel; Crystal-clear technology; LED-backlight; Ultra-white bright LEDs; E-motion (dejuddering); 10-bit signalprocessing; Mercury free; ECO button



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HCC Test card

HCC's test card has been designed to torture even the toughest screens...



A Greyscale

The rear pattern runs from 5% white to 100% black, and the LE700E provides a respectable gradation with few banding issues

B Gold

The searing brightness levels punch through golds like they were the teeth of an American rap star – impressive for an LCD TV

C Red

The TV is slightly less impressive when it comes to red reproduction. Although colour fidelity seems natural, it's not overly bold

AV/CV

Product:
52in LED-backlit screen with 100Hz picture processing

Position:
Top of Sharp's mass-market LCD TV range, only bettered by the super-expensive XSIE

Peers:
Toshiba 55SV685DB; Samsung UE55B7000

backlight, but these are minimal. Yes, the 52LE700E has a rather weighty posterior, chiefly in comparison to the Samsung 7000 and 8000 screens, but as that is entirely down to the rear-mounted LED array, it's a fair trade off for white level performance. What can't be so easily forgiven is the 52LE700E's anonymous, bland face – it's so devoid of expression and character, it could be one of Sir Alan Sugar's assistants on *The Apprentice*. It's hard to imagine this set standing out in a crowd of other LED TVs. And that might be a problem for Sharp.

Fully-loaded

However, as all parents would say of their similarly characterless, fat-bottomed offspring, 'It's what's on the inside that counts.' And they're right. Good news, then, that Sharp certainly hasn't skimped on the feature count.

Apart from the backlight, there are a number of things added to this high-end model that impress, certainly in a home cinema sense.

To begin with, there's a healthy array of expert picture adjustment modes, including a full set of individual colour bars to slide up and down as you wish. Traditionally, picture calibration on Sharp panels has been an awkward and mainly subjective affair, often leading to frustration with the basic controls, such as contrast, brightness and sharpness. And the preset modes

on the 52LE700E are, quite honestly, dreadful (although our Tech Labs reckons the Low preset is reasonably accurate for white balance). Thankfully, these additional sliders help, and you'll want to put aside a good afternoon to play with them.

The 52LE700E also offers a decent selection of noise reduction and picture processing options, including a 100Hz mode. The latter is a major selling point for Sharp, but not for me – I'm rapidly going off frame-doubling technologies (or quadrupling, in some cases). Granted, they provide smooth motion, but when they're enabled, I always feel they create some strange shimmering effects around moving objects and add a general sheen of artificiality to pictures.

Such a stylistic amendment might be fine for standard-definition DVB-T broadcasts and normal DVD – indeed, there's often a vast improvement – but anybody who considers switching on their 100Hz or 200Hz processing for Blu-ray and hi-def content should be locked up in a loony bin. Movies are meant to look like movies, not handycam video diaries. 'Nuff said.

Some manufacturers allow for different grades of frame-multiplying technology. Samsung, for example, gives several options ranging from 'Off' to 'High'. Often, using the lowest mode gives the best results. However, controlling the 100Hz processing of this Sharp set is simply

LED TV bestsellers

We outline four cutting-edge LED TVs that have wowed us in the last year

Sharp LX-52XSIE



At £9,000, this flagship LED-lit screen from Sharp was priced beyond the reach of most

of us, but its RGB LED-infused performance (see p52 for more on RGB LED), slender frame and premium build quality were startling. More a proof-of-concept than a commercial viability, but it showed the world that Sharp meant business, and pocketed an HCC Design Excellence Award back in issue #168.

Samsung UE46B8000



After earlier backlit LED models, Samsung has moved to edge-lit TVs.

The result, in terms of styling, is stunning – this 8000 series squeezes into a body only 29.9mm thin, and comes draped in a luxurious tinted bezel. Picture quality doesn't disappoint, either, with the use of a genuinely impressive light filter providing deep black levels.

Philips 42PFL9803HD



Launched a year ago, Philips' debut LED screen used a direct backlit system

built behind one of the company's LCD panels, and delivered crisp HD images, albeit with some minor motion smearing issues. It's now been replaced by the 04 series models, but you might still find it for sale in some shops with a few hundred quid shaved off the price.

Sony KDL-40ZX1



Sony's first ever LED screen uses an edge-mounted array

to deliver a true designer product. Weighing only 12.2kg and measuring just 10mm at its thinnest point, it needs to be seen to be believed. Just remember, though, that its wafer-thin, good-looking body doesn't have enough room to accommodate speakers or a TV tuner. For the latter it ships with an external media box.

The LED debate

John Archer examines both sides of the LED technology story

LED-lit LCD TVs are currently the hottest thing in the TV world, and at the top of many Christmas wish-lists. But they can be made in different flavours.

First, you can put your array of LEDs (Light-Emitting Diodes) behind the screen, shining their light straight out at the viewer. Or you can position LEDs around the edge of the screen, with their light shining across the back of the panel and bounced out by an array of appropriately angled mirrors. Both these approaches have claimed advantages over the other, and both have their different – and vociferous – backers.

The case for direct LED

Direct LED was the original LED format – and most brands involved reckon it's the best.

As opposed to a 'normal' CCFL-lit LCD TV, where the image is produced via a single lamp behind the screen, direct LED TVs illuminate an image via an array of LED clusters. Typically, these clusters are individually controllable, so you could have one cluster of LEDs more or less switched off while the cluster next to it is blazing at full power – a process called local dimming, which results in deeper blacks and brighter whites co-existing within a single frame.

As well as pictures being, generally, more dynamic, this should produce more convincing black levels overall. After all, local dimming allows light to be largely removed from the picture when required, and black is, by its nature, the absence of light. A more simplified direct LED approach, as exhibited by Sharp's latest range, omits local dimming, but still retains brightness levels.

Another potential direct LED benefit concerns light uniformity. With edge LED, light can lose intensity as it travels further from the screen's edges, potentially

resulting in the picture's centre not enjoying the same brightness and contrast as the outer sections.

We certainly witnessed this problem with Sony's edge-lit 40ZX1, though Samsung has made big steps to equalise the overall light levels with its edge LEDs by using larger reflectors in the centre of the screen than those at the edge.

Used by: Philips, Sharp, Sony, LG.
Direct LED poster boy: Sony KDL-46X4500.

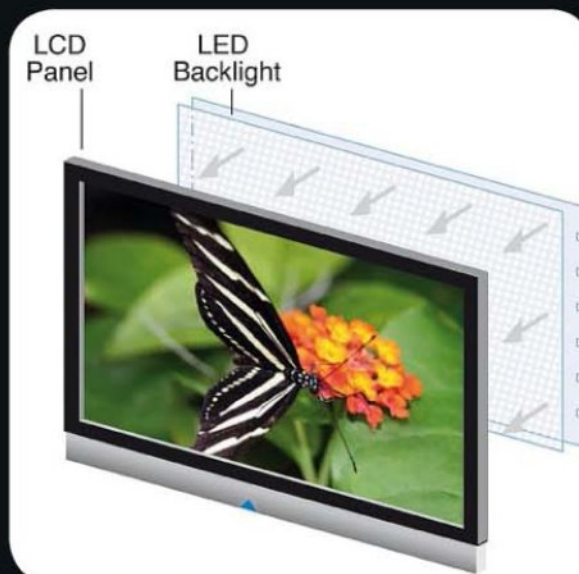
The case for edge LED

Initially, edge LED lighting seemed an aesthetically-motivated choice, as it allows TVs to be slimmer than any direct LED or normal LCD TV. Samsung's 7000 and 8000 series models are under 30mm deep, and Sony's 40ZX1 screen comes in at under 10mm. This clearly makes edge LED a great choice for people wanting to hang their TV on a wall.

The lack of local dimming means edge LED TVs can't do native black levels as profound as those of direct LED. However, edge LED is potentially better at reproducing bright details in generally dark areas. After all, since the amount of LED clusters driving a direct LED screen is far less than the amount of actual pixels in the picture, the dimming process doesn't have the precision to illuminate small individual brighter details. And so, for instance, a shot of outer-space on a direct LED TV might enjoy a deeper black than an edge LED, but will likely also show less stars, as they fall into the LED array's 'gaps'.

Direct LEDs typically use less than 1000 LED lights to drive more than two million pixels. Some current edge LEDs, by comparison, have up to 700,000 reflective mirrors bouncing light through the screen, delivering a light source resolution much closer to the screen's pixel count.

In theory, increasing the number of LED clusters in a direct LED TV should reduce the haloing and missing shadow detail. But this process is expensive, and Samsung



Sharp's LED-branded TVs use a full array of UltraBrilliant white LEDs behind an LCD screen

has shown us results obtained from a direct LED screen built using three thousand LEDs to suggest that increasing the LED cluster count can actually increase image artefacts.

Used by: Samsung (LG, Sony and Philips also carry the technology).
Edge LED Poster boy: Samsung's UE46B8000

The other LED debate

Remarkably, the LED world isn't just sustaining the direct vs edge argument. There's also been a debate over whether to use RGB or white dimming in the LED light clusters.

The proponents of RGB dimming – Sony and Sharp, predominantly – argued that this allowed a TV to produce a more authentic white tone, and a richer colour palette.

However, those in the white dimming camp – Philips and Samsung – point to the relatively high costs involved with using RGB dimming; as much as a 30 per cent reduction in screen-life expectancy due to decreased running efficiency; poor white uniformity over time; and the fact that while RGB can indeed produce a wider colour gamut, the resulting colour range isn't actually in line with our main, actually quite limited, video standards.

In fact, it's possible that this LED tussle could already be over, with Sharp unleashing its series of UltraBrilliant white LEDs, and Sony rumoured to be ditching RGB dimming with its next LED generation.

LED You say...

Amby:

I am not too impressed by the black level of these new LED TVs, I tend to think that the end credits look silly with a gray-ish text on a dark black background, so plasma still has the edge.

What I really do like about LED TVs, though, is the power needed to run them. Numbers are so low compared to plasma and LCD screens that they still might be my choice when my old CRT fails (I use a projector).

Simon Kingsley:

'I wouldn't say LED's environmental considerations are a driving concern. We want to admire the best picture on a set that meets our criteria, but knowing (in the background) that we are saving trees, hugging beavers and paying less is a nice feeling!'

Firebrand:

'LED is an interesting tech, but I'm not sure I want to pay more just because of the backlight. I really don't see what's wrong with normal LCD – especially with some of the new TVs.'

Rob T:

'For me, it's not all about the black levels on a TV – after all, the contrast in a cinema can be poor. I am considering investing in an LED TV for the colours, which look amazing when compared with normal screens.'



The contrast levels on the Sharp panel are first-rate

a case of choosing between 'On' and 'Off' – not exactly state-of-the-art.

Blu-ray playback doesn't suffer here, though, as the 52LE700E will automatically detect that your deck is outputting 1080p24 and alter its processing accordingly. I still advise that you turn off other processing modes (like digital noise reduction) and whack up the sharpness a tad when watching HD video, but at least you can be safe in the knowledge that the panel won't be adding any peculiar artefacts.

Bright star

So, back to the backlight – or, more specifically, the contrast level. For all of my enthusiasm, I have to be honest and say that the blacks produced on this flatscreen aren't the very best I've seen – I found them looking a bit grey in a completely darkened room – but they're impressive in higher ambient light conditions.

And at least Sharp seems to have stopped any bleed from its LED bulbs. The occasional problem with local dimming of light spilling from the edges of zones is avoided here.

And, as previously enforced, **where better black levels may be found elsewhere, you'll struggle to find better brightness.**

That's why the 52LE700E's contrast level (measured at over 80,000:1 by our Tech Labs) is so high – because of the vibrancy of its whites, which also benefit the set's colour response. I am particularly impressed with its green fidelity – a necessity for a sports fan like me.

Reds are slightly muted and orangey – it is, after all, still an LCD TV – but they look vaguely natural and make for convincing HD and SD viewing.

I do have a major gripe about the latter, though. The Freeview tuner in this set is the poor relation. Terrestrial digital broadcasts can be problematic at the best of times, but they don't usually look quite so Lego-esque. There's all manner of edge enhancement and digital noise errors going on. Admittedly, low-bitrate Freeview channels never look good when blown up to 52in, but I'm still somewhat disappointed.

You can get around some of the issues by softening the picture, but I can see a phone call to Sky or Virgin Media on the horizon.

I don't think the 52LE700E's audio performance is worth getting excited about, either. The low-slung speakers seem underpowered, and the various virtual surround modes just make the sound murky. Some form of bass response would've been welcome, too. Pah.

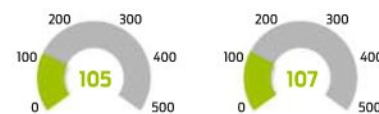
Stiff competition

But, for those with a home cinema set-up, neither of the problems above matter too much. And the Sharp 52LE700E ticks more in the positives box than the negatives. It is undoubtedly a good TV, and I truly believe that owners will get many years of excellent viewing from it.

Does it manage to match up to its rivals, though? I'm not sure. The LED backlight provides brighter pictures than a CCFL TV is capable of, but it doesn't really hold a candle to a local dimming alternative.

→ Tech Labs

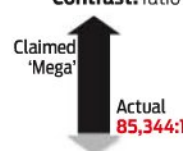
Power consumption: Watts



White screen: With a white 100IRE signal consumption is quite low due to the LED backlighting; Eco mode cuts it down to around 70W

Test footage: There's little difference here, even with the speakers on full volume. This TV has been optimised for power consumption

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Maybe not 'mega' contrast, but getting on towards 100,000:1 is nothing to be ashamed of. Luminance is high, too, at 99.54fl

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: The Low option is the most accurate, but advanced picture parameters allow for perfect adjustment.
Low: 6,727K
Mid-low: 7,994K
Middle: 8,878K
Mid-high: 9,605K
High: 10,451K

HCC VERDICT

Sharp LC52LE700E
£1,900 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Eco-friendly LED backlight; bright, involving pictures; full calibration controls

Lows: Muted reds; poor off-axis viewing, average audio

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Bigger sound for smaller rooms

Adam Rayner gets to grips with the first ever THX Select 2 speaker system and discovers it sounds better than it looks



HOME CINEMA CHOICE

At first sight, you could be forgiven for being slightly underwhelmed by the appearance of the Teufel THX Select2 Cinema set. You get two whacking great cartons with full-size subwoofers inside (hooray) and five speakers no bigger than the regular bookshelves you might find in a kid's room (not hooray).

Looks-wise, they are pointy and ugly and, despite the addition of some brushed metal bits, look cheaply-made. Of course, thinking like that is to miss the point in a big way, for these wear an 'I'm dead 'ard, me!' badge – otherwise known as a THX logo.

Started, as the THX company now says, 'by a maverick director', THX was the brainchild of George Lucas, with audio whizz Tomlinson Holman being his main man. These days both George and Tom are no longer directly involved, but THX forges ahead. Its new versions of the 'Big Room' and 'Smaller Room' THX programs (which sprang from the original) are called THX Ultra2 and THX Select2, with Select2 intended for rooms up to two thousand cubic feet and viewing distances of ten feet. The Ultra2 specification is for the sort of bigger living space you find in American houses. There's even a THX spec

AV/CV

Product:
The world's first THX Select2 5.1-channel surround sound speaker system

Position:
Mid-range in Teufel's THX-certified system lineup

Peers:
Mordaunt Short System 500
THX Select;
M&K 750 THX Select;
Magnat THX Select 5.1

for home-theatre-in-a-box systems these days.

Of course, you need power to run a decent system, let alone a THX system, but don't worry if yours isn't a THX amp of great might, as the speakers are the most influential part of the equation and good, efficient ones will sing with any half-decent AVR.

Call the Police!

And singing is what I tried first with Teufel's 5.2 package: British muso Sting and the surround mix of his hits. This features amazing production values and large dynamics, but was horribly revealing of the system's





Down under:

Stand the S 5000 SW on its head to have a shufti at the 12in bass driver

limits musically. Part of the new THX Select2 spec is a range of new codecs, including one called THX Music, so it is possible that these speakers would sound better with music had I got a THX S2 front end. But I found a sibilance and softness that was definitely an artefact versus what purity I knew to be on the disc.

But the business of these boxes is film soundtracks. I slapped *Dark Knight* into the my Blu-ray deck and settled down for the ride...

Filmed in large chunks in the IMAX format, the soundtrack of *Dark Knight* has a serious level of difference between quiet parts and the most literally explosive. As the film begins, you get quiet and tinkly sounds, followed by a big smash, as the crooks set up a wire from one building to the next. The performance capabilities of the Teufel system suddenly became clear. Like a full set of bike leathers that make their owner look silly whilst doing the weekend shop, but badass when the dude is on his Ducati, **these speakers, once fed a good slice of power, came to life and absolutely stonked.**

All that the THX certification implies is in there. Great directionality, superb placement of sounds around the room due to excellent off-axis performance, and a bass-end that is literally stupefying. However, the main five speakers do not seem that efficient, and I needed to crank ten per cent more than I normally would to get the satisfying reference level. At this point, the two 12in subwoofers, which had been left at the little mark that says 'THX' on the gain knob's marking, had to be turned

down a touch by way of the LFE level from the remote.

With that sorted, it was back to the film and, as the villains got offed one by one in the early sequences, I was beaten into joyful jelly – metaphorically speaking. When Batman thudded down onto the roof of an escaping van, I was almost lifted out of my seat. The system can go loud from quiet effortlessly.

I also loved how well the subwoofers blended with the small speakers, without any trace of a 'hole' between the two sorts – impressive considering the size of the surrounds.

Get, set, go

The system arrived with one of the standard Teufel accessory packs; a hank of speaker cable and banana plugs, plus two phono cords to connect the twin subs up in different parts of the room.

Each of the satellites has a pair of simple plastic brackets on their rear (in the form of short stand-off bars and 'L' shaped brackets on the dipoles). They're ready for wall-mounting, but you can also get stand mounts should you wish.

The L/C/R cabinets feature a pair of 4in mid-range drivers below a 1in tweeter. The rear-channel speakers are more elaborate, with a rear-firing 5in woofer and a mid-range driver and tweeter on other side.

I found the grilles fall off if you touch them. Well, they did when I touched them. In fact, the boxes are clearly designed to be used without the grilles.

They're essentially plain vanilla boxes with sharp corners, cheap-but-effective binding posts and grilles with no fixings (nor Neodymium magnets to hold them on – which, I suspect, would've been costly). I get the impression that these have been made like a stripped-down dragster car – all performance and who cares how they look. Teufel makes far prettier systems, but if all you want to have is THX performance in your viewing room, these will do it for less than most. And you will either need cool neighbours or a detached home, as they do go very loud and with absolutely brain-splitting dynamics.

Performance first

So if you think speakers are just something to deliver surround sound, and you care not for veneers, curvaceous looks, or, erm, grilles that actually stay on, then the Teufel System 5 is probably the right package for you •

→ Specifications

S 500 FCR (front/centre/rear)

Drive Units: 2 x 4in high-tech flat diaphragm midbass; 1in dome tweeter

Enclosure: Two-way sealed with fitted wall brackets

Frequency Response: Not quoted

Power Handling: 130W

Dimensions: 318(w) x 210(h) x 160(d)mm

Weight: 3.1kg

S 500 D (dipole surrounds)

Drive Units: 5in rear-firing woofer; 2 x 4in midrange drivers and 2 x 1in dome tweeters firing in opposite directions, out of phase with each other

Enclosure: Three-way dipolar, sealed, with fitted wall brackets

Frequency Response: Not quoted (+/-3dB)

Sensitivity: 91dB

Power Handling: 110W

Dimensions: 346(w) x 240(h) x 156(d)mm

Weight: 4.7kg

S 5000 SW (subwoofer)

Drive Units: 12in down-firing long excursion design with Neodymium magnet

Enclosure: Sealed

Frequency Response: Able to reach 105dB @ 25Hz @ -3dB (20Hz @ -6dB) with two in 50m² room

Onboard power: 200W RMS

Dimensions: 370(w) x 546(h) x 475(d)mm

Weight: 23.4kg

Connections: Single channel of phono in and output



HCC VERDICT

Teufel System 5 THX Select2

£1,400 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: THX Select 2 certification delivers huge impact; excellent value for money

Lows: Less suitable for 5.1 music than some; a bit ugly, too

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

HD sound completes the picture

Radius^{HD} series

We've enhanced the world's original 'hi-fi' sat/sub speaker systems with new technologies to deliver all the rich dynamic detail of HD audio in a style that's perfect for every room. New Radius^{HD} provides pin-sharp contemporary design across nine models and in a choice of luxury lacquer and real-wood finishes.

R90HD10

"Compact yet grown-up in looks, massive and thrilling sound, the R90HD10 is the kind of contradiction we love"

- What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards 2009



Budget reference

Other decks may offer an array of bells, whistles, toots and whizzbangs, but this Sony refines the basics. **Rik Henderson** applauds its purity...

Never one to follow the herd, Sony has yet again attempted something different in a market where plagiarism is positively encouraged. Where most Blu-ray decks today offer an abundance of special features, streaming-abilities and compatibility with a host of video codecs (popular and otherwise), the manufacturer's latest player doesn't. Indeed, it has purposely and bravely avoided adopting the gadgetry and gimmicks of its competitors and concentrated on making a machine that just plays Blu-rays well. Very well indeed.

Naturally, the BDP-S760 also spins DVDs and CDs and has very capable upscaling talents, but that's a prerequisite and not its major USP. This player is primarily designed to eke out the best picture and sound

performance from your hi-def platters, and you've got to admire such resolute dedication. Especially when it works so well.

Using the same picture-processing found in Sony's top-of-the-range BDP-S5000ES helps. And, while there are a number of other reasons to invest the bigger bucks on a high-end machine (all £1,000-ish of them) if you can afford it, finding this processing on a sub-£400 player is a revelation. It's hugely encouraging to know that the rest of us can enjoy premium-quality video without breaking the bank.

That's partly down to costs being trimmed in other areas – build-quality being the major one. The S760 is neither as sturdy or as massive as the 5000ES. Also, while I may not be particularly fussy on

AV/CV

Product:
A back-to-basics Blu-ray player that concentrates purely on video and audio performance

Positioning:
Sits at the top of Sony's mass-market range, with only the 5000ES above it

Peers:
LG BD390;
Samsung BD-P4600

what my equipment looks like when it's shoved into a rack or a stand under the telly, I'm not a huge fan of decks where the entire fascia has to gape open whenever a disc is inserted or ejected. It just seems flimsy. I believe it's the one instance where this player's design, in and out, has been over-egged, and could have benefited from being more reserved.

However, although rigidity is questionable, stability is not. Indeed, Sony claims that its Precision Drive HD technology is capable of reading information on a scratched or even bent Blu-ray disc. Now, while I believe that grubby, slightly warped and worn discs may be readable – it certainly didn't spit out any of the discs lurking in the corners of the HCC Tech Labs (some of which are distinctly war-torn and battered)



– I do not, for one instance, expect a disc with a circular scratch or severe distortion to work. I'm not about to bend any of my discs to find out though, and I wouldn't recommend you do either.

Up and running

Such bombastic claims aside, the BDP-S760 did indeed play every disc I put into the player, accurately and quietly. It also did so fairly speedily. Thankfully, Blu-ray has rapidly become, erm, rapid, and I think we've finally reached an age where any self-respecting BD player has a decent loading time. Hopefully, we needn't harp on about it for much longer, and boot-up and Java-loading speeds will be standardised.

To be honest, I'd much rather devote my time and attention on something more worthy – the BDP-S760's in-built wireless N modem, for example. LG was first to offer this technology on a Blu-ray deck with its BD390, but it's not exclusive and it would be good to see all machines follow suit. The tech is certainly welcome in this instance as it means that you can plonk the Sony player anywhere you like – you're not regimented by the availability of an Ethernet hub. Admittedly, with scant few streaming abilities on offer (you can merely look at photos stored on a networked computer or NAS drive), there's little need for the enhanced

Shiny Sony:

The entire fascia of the deck opens up to reveal the disc tray

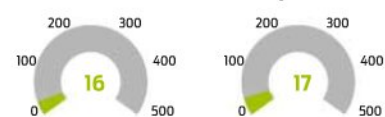
bandwidth that 802.11n technology offers over 802.11g, but at least you don't have to wait an age for BD-Live content to appear. It's also worth noting that you'll need a USB memory stick for some BD-Live content as there's no internal storage. Thankfully, the USB port is on the front panel, not squirrelled around the back.

These are, however, much like its 7.1 analogue audio outputs, not the real issues. **The overriding strength of the S760 is its video and audio performance, which is exemplary.** It sings like a bird (as long as the bird can also replicate gun shots with faultless accuracy), and can paint a picture as detailed and bursting with life, colour and depth as a Renaissance master. The Sony deck ate my *Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen* BD for breakfast, making the most of the blockbuster palette and gleaming chrome visuals, and keeping pace with the frequent camera pans and fast-moving SFX. I don't think there's any player currently available at this price point that compares for Blu-ray playback.

I'm still a massive fan of LG's BD390 for its media-streaming abilities, but maybe I'll have to find a place in my rack for the BDP-S760 as well. It is a reference machine for the budget conscious.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: This kind of consumption won't break the eco-bank

Playing: Even when spinning a BD, the Sony doesn't draw much juice

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: The S760's audio jitter measurement is reasonable and an improvement on the entry-level S360

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

8s

Tray in to main BD menu

66s

Disc loading & Java: Speedy to boot, but there's nothing fast about the Java loading time

→ Specifications

Upscaling: YES 1080p24
Multiregion: NO Region B Blu-ray and R2 DVD
HDMI: YES 1 x v1.3
Component: YES up to 1080i
Multichannel analogue: YES 7.1
Digital audio: YES coaxial and optical
SACD/DVD-A: NO/NO Not here
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD / DTS HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES, with BD-Live
Dimensions: 430(w) x 70(h) x 256(d) mm
Weight: 2.9kg
Also featuring: Advanced Super Bit Mapping; High Definition Reality Enhancer; Headphone surround sound; Wireless-N internet technology; DLNA-certified (for photos only); USB 2.0 port (for JPEGs); x.v.Colour/Deep Colour; PhotoTV HD; Precision Drive HD; XrossMediaBar GUI; Quick startup mode; Bravia Sync



HCC VERDICT

Sony BDP-S760
£380 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Superlative video and audio performance; benefits from trickle-down tech of its older sibling

Lows: Cheapish build quality; few other talents

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Audiofile streamer

HD Digitech has taken the humble media player and given it a high-end makeover. **Steve May** gets out his screwdriver

The HDX-1000 is probably the nearest thing I've seen yet to a cinephile-grade multimedia streamer. Unlike practically every other networkable box on the market, its construction is superb. Styled like the Mac Mini, it features a heavy aluminium alloy chassis that inspires confidence and contains hard drive operational noise.

Like others of its ilk, the HDX-1000 is designed to sit on a network and hook-up directly to your TV, or your AV receiver, via HDMI or legacy connections. It generally ships without a hard drive, but as we show opposite, installing one (the box is

compatible with 3.5in and 2.5in SATA drives) is a painless operation.

The HDX uses the same Syabas middleware as the Popcorn Hour A-110 and C-200 – and that means identical functionality. This is a very good thing – we loved the usability of the original PCH – but this particular Network Media Tank has the added benefit of really being built like a tank.

If you have media (be it music, video, images) on your home network this puppy will find it. It runs in multiple guises – DLNA, SMB, uPnP – which means it's visible to almost everything you'll have connected.

With no effort at all, I could access it via a PC, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and other clients.

Installation is a breeze. As soon as the HDX goes online it lists available workgroups and attached devices using AutoSMB. As long as your storage device doesn't require a password you should be in; this compares starkly to ManualSMB devices, like the TiVX M-6500A, which tend to be a nightmare to setup and use.

The unit handles most file formats, from MP3s to FLAC as well as common video stuff like MPEG-2, MPEG-4, DivX and 720p MKVs.

AV/CV

Product:
Networkable
media
streamer/
player/jukebox

Position:
Above the
HDX-900

Peers:
Popcorn Hour
A-110/C-200,
TiVX M-6500A

→ Specifications

Streaming connectivity: Bonjour; UPnP SSDP; DLNA; Windows Media Connect; Windows Media Player NSS; SMB; NFS; myiHome, WizD SwissCenter, MSP Portal, Llink, and GB-PVR HTTP servers; BitTorrent P2P

NAS access: SMB, NFS, FTP

Web services: YouTube, Google Video, MetaCafe, VideoCast, DLTV, Cranky Geeks; iPodcast, Radiobox, ABC News; Flickr, Picasa; Yahoo! Weather; Yahoo! Traffic alerts; Yahoo! Stock; Cinecast; Shoutcast

Media files supported: MPEG-1/-2/-4 Elementary; MPEG-1/2 PS; MPEG-2 Transport Stream; VOB; AVI; ASF; WMV; MOV; MP4; RMP4; XVID SD/HD; MPEG-1; MPEG-2; MPEG-4.2; WMV9; H.264; AAC; M4A; MPEG Audio; WAV; WMA; FLAC; OGG; Dolby Digital; DTS; LPCM; Vorbis; JPEG; BMP; PNG; GIF; ISO; IFO

Audio pass through: DTS, Dolby Digital, DTS-HD MA, DTS-HD HR, Dolby TrueHD, Dolby Digital Plus

Chipset: Sigma Designs SMP8635

Memory: 512Mb DDR SDRAM; 256Mb Flash

AV outputs: HDMI v1.3a; component video; composite video; stereo analogue audio; coaxial and optical digital audio

Interface: 1x USB 2.0 slave, 2x USB 2.0 host, SATA

Dimensions: 200(w) x 200(d) x 55(h)mm **Weight:** 1.5Kg

Other features: 3 x USB 2.0; Ethernet and wireless LAN connectors; SDHC/MMC card reader



A diskless HDX-1000, as tested here, typically sells for around £190. I popped a Seagate Barracuda 1TB drive into our sample, which allows for an enormous amount of media to be stored locally. There's no need to use a massive drive, though. If you already have a capacious NAS somewhere else, a much smaller housekeeping drive could be installed. In that configuration the HDX-1000 would function more as a streamer. If you don't want to do the HDD install yourself, you can buy a pre-fitted model for around £270 with 1TB storage, from the UK distributor ripcaster.co.uk.

One aspect of the Syabas middleware I love is the online access it provides to other stuff. Via the main Media Services portal, you can access YouTube, Flickr, VideoCast, Cranky Geeks and much more. A community portal (which frankly hasn't been updated for yonks) offers other treats, including access to Apple Movie Trailers and Miro – which in itself is a microcosm of diverse content. There's also extensive podcast access. In many ways, you could consider the HDX a set-top box for internet TV services

– and like Freeview there are no subscriptions to be paid.

Connectivity other than the HDMI includes Ethernet jack, gold-plated component, composite and phono stereo outputs, two USB inputs and a USB slave for hooking up directly to a PC and transferring files. Digital audio is delivered via coaxial and optical.

Overall performance is excellent. Over my wired network, hi-def files streamed smoothly without stuttering. Apparently Blu-ray rips will also play with hi-rez audio intact, although this was not tested.

However, while the unit is fine for AV, I found it way too sluggish for photo browsing. Hi-res images take much too long to render. Consequently, I didn't find much use for the front-mounted 3-in 1 card reader (which takes Memory Stick, SDHC and MMC media). A BitTorrent client is also provided but the implementation is clunky and not really worth pursuing.

I'd rate the HDX-1000 as a top-flight jukebox. Build quality is gorgeous and functionality supreme. If you suffer from media file disorganisation, you'll soon wonder how you ever lived without it ●

The HDX is one of the best-built media streamers you can buy

HCC VERDICT

HD Digitech HDX-1000
£190 Approx (without HDD)

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Excellent build quality; easy to setup and use; wide file support

Lows: Slow photo browser

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



DIY HDX:
Installing a hard drive in the HDX is fast and easy. Just get a screwdriver and spare HDD

Screwed:
Helpfully, the baseplate is pre-drilled to accommodate both 3.5in and 2.5in SATA drives



Drive choice:
The unit will stream media without a hard drive installed, but adding a drive greatly improves functionality

Silent Seagate:

We chose a 1TB Seagate Barracuda 7200.12 for the HDX, because it's fast and quiet, great for AV use



Sorted: The Seagate drive is screwed direct to the lid of the HDX – make sure the fittings are snug to prevent rattles

Hooked up:
Lacing up the SATA cable takes a few minutes, then the unit is reassembled



Job done:
Once powered up, the HDX automatically prompts to download new firmware



ADVERTISEMENT



Seeing is believing

looking for a Home C

How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that suits you? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer.

This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis, that is without professional input, are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

“...without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity”

cinema

LISTED HERE ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.

Listed on this page are 20 of the best AV shops in the country. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to

its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

system?..

...Ask the experts



OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent SOUNDRAFT HI-FI

40 High Street. 01233 624441

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI

216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245

Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI

33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.

020 8943 3530

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI

44a High Street. 01268 779762

Custom Install Dept.

01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI

132/4 London Road. 01702 435255

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA

69 London Road, Southborough.

01892 535007

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.

020 7924 2040

Ealing AUDIO VENUE

27 Bond Street. 020 7924 2040

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE

163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION

48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS

93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA

17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI

441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

Edinburgh LOUD & CLEAR

Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.

0131 555 3963

Glasgow GLASGOW AUDIO

135 Great Western Road.

0141 332 2200/4707



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

The HD20 is one of a new breed of wallet-friendly 1080p projectors



→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24

Component video: YES one input

HDMI: YES two v1.3 HDMI's

PC input: YES

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI

Lumens

Contrast ratio (claimed): 500:1

Dimensions: 324(w) x 97(h) x

234(d)mm

Weight: 2.9kg

Features: Texas Instruments native

16:9 1080p DLP chipset; six-

segment colour; vertical keystone

correction; 29dB fan noise; 1.50-

1.8 throw ratio; lamp life: 3,000

hours (4,000 in eco mode)

Value cinema

Optoma does Full HD on a budget and largely succeeds, says **Jim Hill**



A Full HD projector with native 1080p resolution is the ultimate prize for home cinema enthusiasts. And now you can pick one up for less than £900, thanks to the new abundance of Texas Instruments' precious hi-def DLP chipsets, and some aggressive pricing by manufacturer Optoma.

With InFocus and BenQ putting out similarly-priced DLP projectors boasting Full HD resolution, this is an exciting new category and one that will spell trouble for all the affordable LCD projectors out there that can only manage 720p. The next cheapest Full HD LCD projector is nearer £2,000...

A tighter squeeze

It's hard not to be impressed by a full 1080p image blown up fill a nine-foot screen and the HD20 certainly doesn't disappoint.

First I beamed a high-res digital JPEG to appreciate the closely-packed pixels on the Dark Chip 2 that this projector is built around. The DC2 module is a venerable design, albeit one that has stood the test of time well. The device delivers a pleasing level of contrast which belies the budget nature of the PJ.

In use it delivers a fine image, particularly with games consoles (increasingly a significant element of the affordable end of the projection market). Films fare well, too. Well-produced Blu-rays like *Watchmen* dazzle with detail. Moving images look well-defined, with crisper delineation and more solid colours than PJs that top out at 720p. The slo-mo opening credits gave me ample time to wow at the texture of the spent bullets on the floor. The projector can deliver plenty of hi-def detail – and that's crucial if you're watching on a really large screen.

Watchmen also has its fair share of difficult dark scenes, which the HD20 struggles with at times. If your room has a fair amount of ambient light, you can use Optoma's Bright mode, but it's at the expense of contrast and black levels. Best to block out ambient light as much as possible and switch to Eco. Even so, some of the gloomiest sequences still remain lost in shadow, whereas a more adroit (and expensive) projector would resolve them a little better.

The colour palette is understated, which makes for realistic skin tones, but at the expense of vividness.

This unit is well made for a budget model, but don't expect more than the basics. There's no optical lens shift for example (only vertical keystone correction) and the zoom is limited, which makes this short-throw PJ quite fussy about placement. It couldn't focus on my screen from the back of the room, which means fixing it to the ceiling directly overhead, or plonking on the coffee table in front. This might suit some, but it does mean you're closer to the HD20's cooling fan. Optoma optimistically calls the HD20's 29dB operational noise as 'whisper quiet'. It's not.

What could be more of an issue is DLP's rainbow effect, where your eyes perceive a blur of colour in front of the screen. Some people are more sensitive to it than others and I'm about average, but I did find it distracting here. Optoma, however, says its six-segment (RGBRGB) colour wheel system is the best option around for reducing the effect.

Recession buster

Despite these criticisms, I'd have no qualms about recommending the HD20 to someone looking to step up from flatscreen to projection on a tight budget – it represents great value for money.

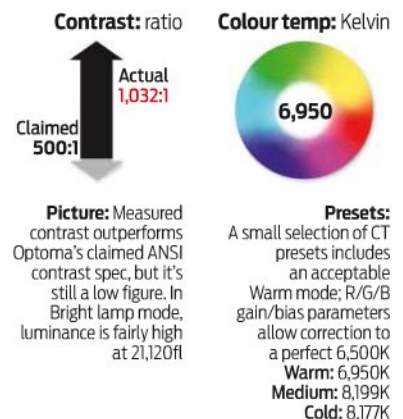
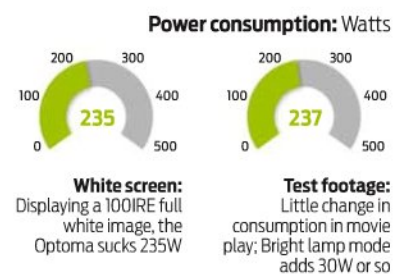
AV/CV

Product:
Budget-priced
Full HD front
projector

Position:
Optoma's most
affordable
home cinema
projector

Peers:
InFocus X10

→ Tech Labs



HCC VERDICT

Optoma HD20
£900 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Remarkable value; excellent detail resolution; reasonable contrast and brightness

Lows: Some fan noise; evident rainbow effect; limited throw distance

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Steroid messiah

The TX-NR807 is a feature-packed AVR sure to find a devoted following, with **Richard Stevenson** at the front of the queue



Onkyo is famed for being first out of the traps with desirable new features, and the TX-NR807 is certainly no exception. This is the first receiver under £1,000 to feature Dolby ProLogic IIz and Audyssey DSX processing. Opinions on the merits of both formats and the need to move rear-back speakers to front-height or front-wide position are divided (largely between me and the HCC

editor) but I am right and anyone who disagrees is wrong. Audyssey DSX and Dolby ProLogic IIz are a revelation in home cinema sound and a must-have for any modern set up. And now Onkyo has made this available in a stunningly specified THX Select2 receiver all for £800. Thank you Team Onk!

It's not my perfect solution though. The TX-NR807 is still a seven-channel amp, meaning you will have

Fashion faux pas: And we thought blue and green should never be seen

to dispense with rear-back channels to choose between either height channels or DSX width speakers. A little further up the Onkyo food chain are nine-channel amps that allow any two-out-of-three combination of height, width and rear-back. How long before 11-channel models emerge so you can use all three effects together?

Like every Onkyo I have had the pleasure of reviewing over the last

→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES plus Digital, Digital Plus, EX and Pro Logic IIz

DTS-HD Master Audio: YES plus DTS, DTS+, ES, Neo:6, DTS 96/24, DTS Express, DTS-HD High Resolution

THX: YES THX Select2 Plus

Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 180W amplifiers

Multichannel input: NO stereo only

Multiroom: YES main plus two zones

AV inputs: YES 5 x S-video & composite; 6 x digital audio (3 x coaxial, 3 x optical)

HDMI input/output: YES 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)

Video upscaling: YES to 1080p

Component: YES 2-in, 1-out

Dimensions: 435(w) x 435(d) x 199(h)mm

Weight: 18kg

Features: Ethernet; Audyssey DSX; Faroudja DCDi scaler; FM/AM tuner; vTuner access; RHID remote comms protocol over HDMI; Audyssey Dynamic EQ/Volume; dual subwoofer pre-outs; bi-directional remote; DTS Surround Sensation headphone; bi-amping capability; iPod dock via dedicated port



ten years, with the TX-NR807 you get a whole lot of amp for your hard-earned money – it's big, heavy and packed with features. It's clearly built to hit a price, though. The terminals are all a bit flimsy, the case feels like a biscuit tin and the set-up mic is so light that the weight of its own cable pulls it off any makeshift stand. Still that is what Blu-Tack is for – and that's going to add about a pound to the overall price.

The TX-NR807's looks are straight out of Onkyo's in-house style guide, with a vivid blue highlight around the top of the volume knob that conspires to make the display look a rather wishy-washy green colour.

What's missing?

Some might find the Onkyo's lack of front-mounted HDMI's or any USB input a bit of letdown, but you do get full networking via Ethernet, vTuner access, six HDMI inputs, some multiroom functionality and all-input upscaling to 1080p. And it will, of course, decode those gorgeous Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio mixes.

AV/CV

Product:
Feature-rich
AV receiver for
under a grand

Positioning:
Of Onkyo's 12
multichannel
receivers, this
one is mid-
range

Peers:
Pioneer
VSX-LX52;
Denon
AVR-2310;
Marantz
SR-6003

But back to DSX/DLP IIz. From past experience I plumped for a basic 5.1 set-up and connected up a pair of front height speakers to the relevant terminals. This has potentially the greatest benefit with a big projector screen and it plays into the sumptuous hands of both DSX and DLP IIz Height, whereas using front width speakers would only be of use with the Audyssey format. That and I don't really have room to squeeze in width speakers effectively.

Configuration shenanigans aside, **the back panel serves up a set of speaker terminals for every possible channel configuration**, all eleven of them. The opening page on the GUI replicates the speaker terminal lay-out for ease of identification and allows you to bi-amp the fronts if you want to be a Luddite and ignore the benefits of front height channels. Setup is pleasingly simple and the network connection (over a tricky wireless Ethernet bridge just for the challenge of it) automatically detected and enabled the connection before I had even found the Network

menu. The additional manual set-up for input assignments is straightforward and, at this price point, there are no deep menus (i.e. picture fine-tuning) to get lost in.

Unfortunately, the flipside of the Onkyo's straightforward nature is an over-simplified remote control. There are precious few direct access buttons to the audio modes or EQ features, which means, for example, scrolling through up to a dozen audio modes (including such delights as mono) just to toggle between DPL IIz and DSX. For an incessant fiddler like myself, it's a pain, but fire it up for a movie and leave it in that mode until the end-credits roll and you won't have an issue.

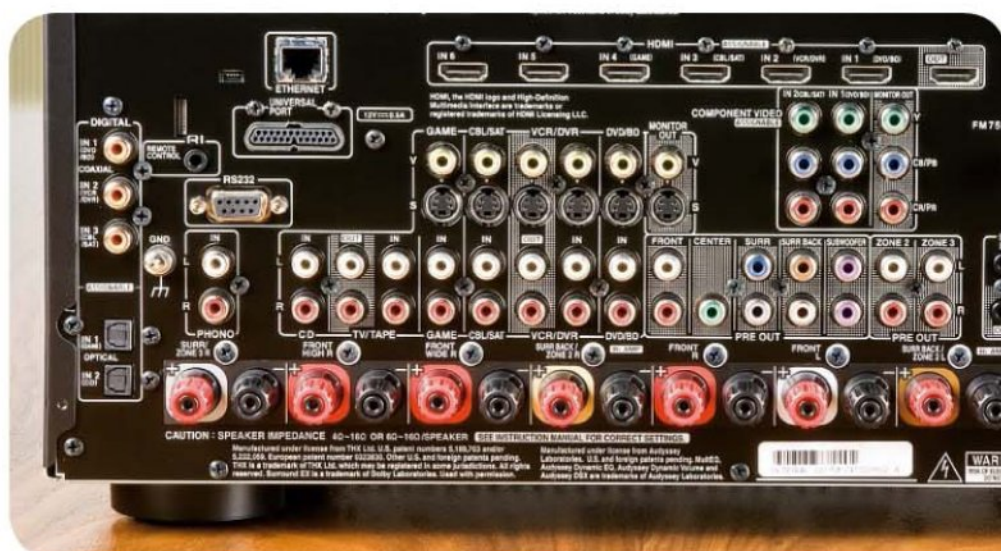
Pumped up

The TX-NR807's sound comes at you on steroids. It is incredibly crisp and blessed with a stunning transient attack at the top-end that would embarrass many amplifiers at twice the price. Playing the fast-paced opening sequence to *Quantum of Solace* (Blu-ray) in standard DTS-HD mode (also the test sequence for our

Onkyo's mid-range AVR packs in a wealth of features



JANUARY 2010 HOME CINEMA CHOICE



Got your back:

Rearside connections are adequate, but the absence of multichannel inputs might pose a problem for some

sub/sat speaker system group (test on p88), the Onkyo all but picks you up and drags you along for the ride. Switch to DPL IIz or DSX, and the ride is sonically three-dimensional, adding plenty of vertical scale to the mix.

The TX-NR807 thrusts the crashes, clatters, bangs and effects into the room with sheer gusto, and the gung-ho bass all but rattled a glass light-fitting off the ceiling. Strewth! A shrinking violet it is not. With the Audyssey EQ boosting the top-end in my slightly dead-sounding room, the effect is fantastic; a fun and drop-dead impressive five-minute demo to wow your friends with.

However, the LFE is just too big, too rounded and too forward in the mix to sustain a long movie without having to call time out for a break halfway through. This massive bass is perhaps the 807's weakest link. It's not particularly tight or punchy, despite there being plenty of it, and there's an uncomfortable drone to some of the lower rumbling effects. This can permeate the bottom-end of the vocal range, on occasion keeping male voices shut-in and chesty. Of course, backing down the sub setting allows a perfectly good LFE balance, but the bottom-end of the Onkyo's performance simply doesn't have the dynamism to match the incredibly fast and detailed top-end. Despite that, I still think **the Onkyo provides a hugely spectacular vista of potent home cinema sound** that fights well above its price point in terms of sheer entertainment value.

Swapping between DPL IIz height and DSX modes, and engaging some of the THX Select 2 Plus post-processing features, reveals a wealth of different sonic balances that will

keep you twiddling for months. For instance, when added to a TrueHD soundtrack I preferred the slightly more detailed and open sound of DPL IIz over the more robust but heavier DSX balance. Either way, the upgrade in overall soundstage with both is excellent and, in my opinion, eclipses the sound of any like-for-like standard 7.1 set-up.

And the tricks up the TX-NR807's capacitors don't end there. The vTuner access is very slick to use and Onkyo's music enhancer goes a long way to making low-bitrate music quite listenable.

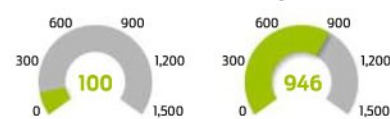
The Onkyo's Faroudja DCDi scaler with 'Cinema Enhancement' performs standard-def-to-1080p conversion with remarkable smoothness, and is one of the best I have seen in a sub-£1,000 amplifier. The acid test for scalars is *Ice Age* on DVD, as it is packed with graduated colour swathes. These areas often fill half the screen and can show really obvious banding. The Onkyo all but eliminates the banding in the lush blue skies of the film, leaving a softly-focused but much improved DVD picture. It's like a wholesale upgrade for your entire DVD collection.

Brutal bargain

Onkyo's TX-NR807 is not the last word in subtlety where home cinema sound is concerned, but if you like your movies fulsome and fruity this receiver certainly fits the bill. Add to that the spectacular soundstage improvements wrought by DPL IIz, DSX and the THX modes, fabulous SD upscaling, great networking features and that £800 price tag, and it's safe to say that Onkyo has unleashed yet another first-class bargain on the AVR market.

→ Tech Labs

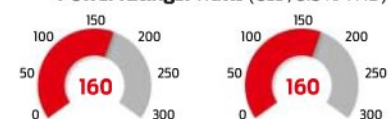
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Onkyo's THX AVR uses 100W when left on – a similar amount to a typical 40in LCD TV

Powered: With five channels driven, consumption leaps to 946W

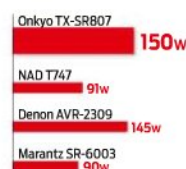
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



2-channel 8Ω: The TX-NR807 delivers a decent two-channel performance – 160W into 8Ω tallies well with Onkyo's own 180W into 6Ω claim

5-channel 8Ω: With five channels driven the Onkyo doesn't flounder. This is a good performance for a mid-range AVR

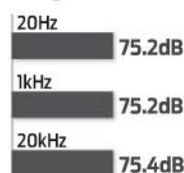
Untainted: Watts



Fidelity firewall:

A measurement of power untainted by distortion (0.052THD, 8Ω, 1kHz), this Onkyo performs better than many of its rivals

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests: These are very good results at all frequencies, showing good consistency



HCC VERDICT

Onkyo TX-NR807
£800 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Full-on gung-ho sound with massive bass; DSX/DPLIIz; SD upscaling

Lows: The bass is a little too massive; slightly flimsy build; no USB

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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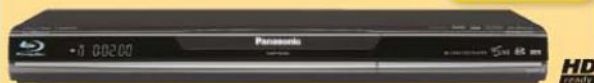
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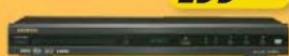
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Pioneer's two-tiered design is certainly eye-catching



Peaking at PQLS

Richard Stevenson finds a lot to like about Pioneer's most affordable LX-branded Blu-ray player – but then he also has the matching AVR...



Pioneer really has got a handle on making its kit look absolutely drop-dead gorgeous. And I don't just mean the cosmetics. The flagship BDP-LX91 Blu-ray player (still available) has a picture so sharp, so crisp and so realistic it hurts – mostly in the wallet, considering the £1,700 asking price. I always thought that if Pioneer stripped out a few of the audiophile tweaky bits, cut down on the nonessential features like the simultaneous twin HDMI outputs

and packaged the leftovers in a smaller, slimmer, and more-affordable case, then I might be in with a chance of sneaking one past the wife.

Helpfully, Pioneer has done just that and a little more besides. Not only does the £500 BDP-LX52 sport much of the LX91's core processing, it comes to the test bench with the multichannel version of the brand's innovative PQLS (Precision Quartz Lock System) technology, which synchronises the audio data clock in

Filter down:
The LX52 borrows technology from Pioneer's flagship LX91

the deck with the data clock in a PQLS-enabled amplifier to reduce audio jitter over HDMI. The aim is much cleaner and sharper high-fidelity sound, and this was certainly borne out on the stereo-only PQLS mode of the BDP-LX91. The BDP-LX52's multichannel version promises to do the same with movie soundtracks and multichannel music.

But it proved not to be quite that simple. A combination of confusing graphical menus (the PQLS function is buried in the KURO-Link menu),



→ Specifications

Video upscaling: YES Up to 1080p
 Multiregion: NO Region B (BD); R2 (DVD)
 HDMI: YES v1.3a
 Component: YES Blu-ray playback up to 1080i
 Multichannel phono audio: NO stereo only
 Digital audio: YES Coaxial and optical outs
 SACD/DVD-A playback: NO Not here
 Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: YES/YES
 Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream: YES/YES
 Profile 2.0: YES with full BD-Live compatibility
 Dimensions: 420(w) x 83(h) x 287(d)mm
 Weight: 3.6kg
 Features: AVCHD playback; KURO Link; PQLS jitter elimination circuit; DivX compatible; JPEG, AVI, WMA, & MP3 playback; Ethernet port; USB port; RS232 control port

some minor issues in syncing Blu-ray player and amplifier (in this case Pioneer's SC-LX82 – the PQLS function will only work if it's supported by both source and receiver), and me not reading the very small print in the manual lead to some frustration. In fact I had chewed the end off of the remote control before I managed to get PQLS working.

The reason is this: the PQLS function only works on LPCM – not any of the bitstream formats such as Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio. If the Blu-ray movie you are about to watch has a native LPCM soundtrack than all is well and good, but movies with only Dolby or DTS soundtracks need decoding into LPCM within the player before being sent over HDMI to the amplifier. Those that put a lot of store by the quality of the DACs in their receiver may be torn over what output to use.

Still spitting out bits of plastic in frustration, I checked for software updates. This advised me Firmware Version 3.34a was ready to download and install, and would

AV/CV

Product:
Pioneer's mid-range Profile 2.0 player

Positioning:
One of eight BD-spinners currently on Pioneer's books

Peers:
Denon BDP-2010; Marantz BD-7004

take 99 minutes. I pressed Start and took myself off to bed with a Valium sandwich.

The next morning, stress levels suitably reduced, I started my audition again...

So, here we have Pioneer's latest mid-priced Blu-ray player. It looks the mutt's-nuts, is well-featured and is a full-fat Profile 2.0 machine with Ethernet connectivity, universal USB-drive storage, DivX playback and comprehensive picture controls – the latter usefully including individual black and white levels. The network connection is remarkably plug 'n' play, and Pioneer's Set-Up navigator makes the whole install almost idiot-proof (notwithstanding my issues with PQLS, which proves I can out-idiot even the best idiot-proofing). There is a host of link-up features if you happen to own some other Pioneer kit, too, but I'm yet to be convinced by CEC HDMI control, finding it can cause more accidental power-downs than it's worth.

Tasty treat

Features, though, are little more than a side-dish to the BDP-LX52's main

feast of visual entertainment. Capturing a good 95 per cent of the pure brilliance that is the BDP-LX91's picture, this rather more affordable machine fights well above its price point in sheer visual splendour. The deep, deep blacks are pure midnight with your head in a sack, and the colour rendition is vibrant yet smooth and natural. **There is none of the cartoon-like saturation that cheaper players exhibit** to bolster their appeal in Currys on a bright Saturday afternoon, and the Pioneer's fleshtones look particularly natural and, well, fleshy. Motion scrolling is super-slick, and even on a single-chip DLP projector, shown at 120ins diagonal, the picture's depth is amazing.

Ghost In The Shell 2: Innocence is not a great movie to exhibit natural colour (mainly because all the character's faces are grey and featureless) but the scenery is spectacular. As the ship flies over the Locus Solus headquarters the scenery pans flawlessly and, as the ship turns, the picture is so



Phono-phobia:

A lack of multichannel audio outputs mean this needs to be partnered with an HDMI-enabled AVR

close to true 3D it makes me wonder why glasses-based 3D video is a hot topic at all. Thanks to the beautiful shadow detailing and superb textural information you can all but reach out and touch the dark metal of the craft. The film is liberally scattered with moments just like this and, from the bell in the shop doorway to the music-box machine in the great hall, the feeling of solidity is incredible.

Innocence is just such a disc with no native LPCM soundtrack and uses DTS-HD Master Audio instead. By setting the player's output to PCM (forcing the decoding internally) and engaging the PQLS function, you can switch between PQLS and non-PQLS data transfer using a single key-press on the SC-LX82's remote control. With PQLS switched on the sound is absolutely first-class with huge scale, immense detail and a near silent backdrop. The music-box is vividly portrayed and you can hear its sound expand into the vastness of the hall with outstanding ambience and clarity.

Switch off the PQLS and I found the sound to be, well, equally as impressive. Like its flagship sibling,

the LX52 is a fabulous-sounding player as it stands – in my opinion **the PQLS feature is simply a cherry on top of some already well-sculptured icing**. In fact, I still think the biggest attraction of PQLS is with two-channel music from CD. On discs with finely recorded music it shows its true mettle. Voices are just a little cleaner, there seems to be an improvement in the overall dynamic range and the top-end is even sweeter and more natural.

PQLS, then, might be a little lost on all-action blockbusters but it's a nice feature to have should you have a matching AVR. I guess it remains to be seen just how attractive PQLS is to audiophiles at large – personally I might be more excited if the deck also span Super Audio CDs and DVD-Audio discs.

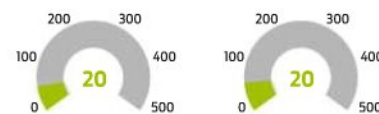
Worth the wait

The LX52 suffers in so much as it's following up the LX91, one of the finest Blu-ray players I've ever used. If I'm being pedantic, I would say the slimline LX52 doesn't quite have the DVD upscaling prowess or the hi-fi audio credentials of its bigger brother, nor does it offer multichannel phono outputs – a clear sign that it's meant to be partnered with modern-day receiver, but a possible turn off to some buyers. In use it also seems achingly slow – the HCC Tech Labs timed 102 seconds to get to our test disc's opening menus.

On the other hand, it packs 1GB of internal memory (so no need to faff around with USB sticks to use BD-Live) and looks gorgeous. Add in the top-quality visuals and surround sound performance and you have a machine that lays a clear claim to the best mid-range Blu-ray player crown •

→ Tech Labs

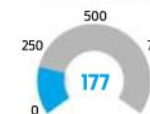
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: A slightly higher than average consumption when it comes to idling

Powered: We found no measurable increase between idling and playing – go figure

Audio Jitter: Ps



Sound: An excellent audio jitter measurement of 177 picoseconds suggests Pioneer has used high-quality components and circuit design

Video Jitter: Ns



Vision: Another very good result, up there with the best BD decks we've yet tested

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

20s

Tray in to main BD menu

102s

Disc loading & Java: Snooze-worthy bootup and loading times leave this player chasing some competitors

HCC VERDICT

Pioneer BDP-LX52

£500 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Class-leading picture and sound; features galore; looks great
Lows: Not simple to get to grips with; multichannel PQLS only on LPCM

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Match made:

As part of Pioneer's LX range, the BDP-LX52 is an aesthetic match for LX-branded AVRs, like the SC-LX82



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cnet uk, Dec 2008: "Earth-shattering THX bass"

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S series lacks spice

John Archer's tastes are left unsated by a budget Bravia



One element in Sony's frequently fraught relationship with flat TV technology has been its inability to sell LCD TVs as cheaply as its rivals. Hence my surprise when I spied the price tag on this 37in KDL-37S5500 – a really quite aggressive £600.

In fact, this is the most affordable way yet for Sony fans to get one of the brand's mid-sized screens. It's a pity, then, that the TV doesn't do its marque more justice.

Things begin badly thanks to a rather dour-looking design, and don't really improve in connectivity terms – three HDMI and no Ethernet connection. A JPEG/MP3-capable USB is really the only 'fancy' provision. Another disappointment is the 37S5500's use of Sony's Bravia Engine 2 video processing, despite the existence of a third-generation system on every model higher in Sony's range – including the only marginally more pricey V5500 range.

The lack of BE3 processing is immediately noticeable in a couple of key areas: standard-definition pictures look noisier, and motion isn't nearly as well-handled, with

smearing evident over sport and action scenes.

A more general concern is the 37S5500's black level response. It's far less impressive than that of Sony's higher-spec models. The darker areas of *Year One* on Blu-ray suffer from a grey pall that I wouldn't expect to see on similarly-priced TVs from other brands – especially Samsung. I can only assume from this that the 37S5500 is using a last-generation panel design as well as last-gen processing.

Despite these flaws, this budget Bravia isn't an unmitigated disaster.

It scores strongly with its great colour response, for instance, combining vibrancy with natural tones. HD pictures are impressively detailed and crisp, too – as long as there's not much motion going on.

Yet, with some rather flat, distortion-prone audio bringing me back down to earth with a bump, the 37S5500 ultimately fails to be anything other than an average TV, made all the more pointless by the fact that its superior 37V5500 sibling can be had for barely £40-£50 more •

AV/CV

Product: A 37in LCD with Bravia Engine 2 processing

Position: The S5500 series is Sony's entry-level LCD range, below the V5500 and W5500 models

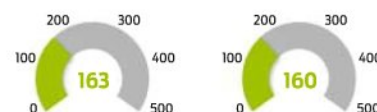
Peers: Samsung LE37B550; Toshiba 37RV635; LG 37LH5000

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24
Progressive scan: YES NTSC and PAL
Digital TV tuner: YES
Scart: NO but adaptor is provided
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES four v1.3 HDMI
PC input: YES 1 x D-Sub
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 33,000:1
Dimensions: 927(w) x 627(h) x 259(d)mm
Weight: 16.5kg
Features: MPEG noise reduction; USB playback of JPEGs and MP3s; Bravia Engine 2 processing; 24p True Cinema processing

→ Tech Labs

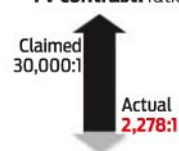
Power consumption: Watts



White screen: Power consumption is average for this size set, but the Eco mode cuts it to 137W

Test footage: Little difference here; Picture Off mode cuts it to 25W

TV contrast: ratio



Picture: Optimistic claims for dynamic contrast boil down to a rather more realistic 2,278:1 after calibration, backing up our reviewer's subjective views on the Sony's black level

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: While the Cool and neutral presets are way off, the Warm preset is just about right – pity though there are no separate RGB adjustments.
Warm: 6,716K
Cool: 11,536K
Neutral: 9,690K

HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-37S5500
£600 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Sony's cheapest 37in LCD yet; good HD detailing; rich colours; bright presentation

Lows: Uninspiring design; motion blur; underwhelming black level response; underpowered audio

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

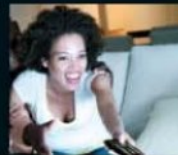
Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Converts analogue Scart or Component into digital HDMI at a fixed 720P. Great for connecting legacy equipment to an HDMI switchbox for simplifying your connections.

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Code HDUS

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Keene IR Distribution Amplifier

- External receiver routes IR signals to internal wands
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Code IRBKITS

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Code KIRA

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£99.99

Code KIRAM

Additional Module

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plug professional range 2160p rated 7.5m	HDHDC75	£69.99

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Composite/video to component	CPVSRGB	£69.00
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Tiny PC that can

Chris Jenkins downsizes his media PC

If you want PC entertainment power in your living-room without having a huge clunking Media Center PC, or even a laptop, rush to audition this 'nettop', a severely cut-down desktop PC using an Nvidia ION graphics solution.

Packard Bell's Imax Mini isn't the first of its kind – in fact this is basically a rebadging of Acer's Revo. It's designed to be used in one of two ways – either standing or sitting on your desktop, or clamped to the back of a monitor using an optional extra mounting kit.

It ships with a wired mouse and compact keyboard (wireless models are optional). Connections include HDMI, USB and LAN, plus a front ESATA port for access to high-capacity hard drives, or indeed an optical drive, which is the one thing the Imax Mini significantly lacks.

The highest specced model uses an Intel Atom 230 processor, 2GB of

memory, a 160GB hard disk drive and 802.11n Wi-Fi. Variations are available in terms of hard-drive size, RAM size, and operating system (Windows XP or Windows Vista, with presumably Windows 7 to follow).

Highs

- It runs extremely quietly, and when a decent codec pack (try the K-Lite Codec Pack which comes with Media Player Classic) is installed, can handle a wide variety of formats, including HD MKVs.

- Ideal as dedicated media PC, using XBMC, or a multifunction living room PC.

- The integrated HDMI output makes AV hookup a dream.

Lows

- No built-in optical drive, but when used as a networked device this shouldn't be a problem.

- Out of the box, stutters with HD files.



Bell boy:
The Imax Mini can be clamped to the back of a monitor

HCC VERDICT

Packard Bell Imax Mini N3600
£250 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**

SHARP HT-SB200 → £130 Approx → www.sharp.co.uk

Sharp shrinks the soundbar

Jim Hill auditions an audio solution aimed at 32in TVs



Hats off to Sharp for coming up with the simplest way to boost your TV's audio output. Just sling this strap-on soundbar below your flatscreen, connect the analogue stereo outputs and it'll give you a marked improvement over your TV's own speakers – but don't think that this will give you an instant home cinema.

As the TV brands compete over thinness, the sound quality is being effectively squeezed out, which makes this 2.1 upgrade a tempting proposition, but this one isn't actually much bigger than the speakers it's meant to be substituting.

Highs

- A good fit for a 32in or 40in TV, this compact and sexily-styled cabinet is

just a few inches deep and wide, so it can be easily fixed to the wall or TV stand below your set without drawing attention to itself. It just needs a power lead and stereo phono lead (both supplied) to get going, so concealing the cables is easy enough, too.

- When activated with the credit card-sized remote control, it made its presence felt with a significant bump in volume, clarity, depth and bass weight over the internal speakers of my 32in V-series Sony.

- In Cinema and Game modes, it adds appreciable projection to the sound and makes dialogue much easier to follow.

Lows

- The four sound modes enhance the

stereo performance somewhat, but it has trouble focusing a stereo image with such small drive units.

- The four subwoofers are clearly not the air-shifters that we're used to at HCC, and unsurprisingly, they don't muster much of a rumble between them. More of a mumble really.

- I can see the advantage for owners of 32in sets with really dreadful internal speakers, but it's not a massive leap in quality and larger sets may well have better sound systems of their own.

HCC VERDICT

Sharp HT-SB200
£130 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**

In Brief



Shooting the Sh*t with Kevin Smith
Titan Books
£10 Approx

While Kevin Smith has written some very interesting books in his time, this isn't one of them. Instead, this tome collects together transcripts of his rather rambling and aimless Podcasts – it feels like you're reading a collection of short chats between people at the pub.

1 2 3 4 5

Active baby boomers

Adam Rayner wonders if this active sub/sat system will find a home



The Genelec system is undeniably stylish

→ Specifications

Genelec 6010A (satellites)

Drive Units: 3in cone with one 0.75in metal dome tweeter, both loaded with Genelec's DCW (Directivity Control Waveguide) horn technology

Enclosure: Two-way rear horn-ported
Frequency Response: 74Hz-18kHz +/-2.5dB

Power: 12W active to each driver, so 24W RMS total each enclosure

Dimensions: 121(w) x 195(h) x 114(d)mm

Weight: 1.4kg

Connections: Phono line in with level adjustment

Genelec 5040A (subwoofer)

Drive Units: 6.5in driver

Enclosure: Ported, downward-firing

Frequency Response: 35Hz-85/120Hz +/-3dB

Power Handling: 40W

Dimensions: 251(h) x 305(diameter) mm

Weight: 4.7kg

Connections: Six phono inputs and five outputs, plus 3.5mm stereo input jack and volume control connector

Manufacturer Genelec has roots as deep as time in the pro-audio market, predominantly with huge active studio monitors of awesome perfection for diction and clarity. Yet it has been making quiet forays into home cinema/small studio-friendly areas for some years now – and this array is its smallest yet. Our test system uses the dinkiest satellite available, the 6010A and the stumpy 5040A subwoofer.

While this Genelec package can be used in a home cinema setting I suspect it will ultimately find its way into the homes of music business types familiar with the brand. I was told that The Prodigy take a set on tour to mix with, but I reckon it's a stereo iteration – they'd need a roadie with a brain the size of a planet to set up a 5.1 system.

The woofer is the hub. First, you need to input via a 3.5mm tip-ring-sleeve stereo jack if you want two-channel and then connect onwards to the sats via a pair of phono cables. But if you want 5.1 surround, you'll need a six-way phono loom from your source to wherever you put the woofer, and then plug in each of the five surround speakers with their own phonos – and, of

course, their own mains lead.

Compare that with the one phono lead for bass and five speaker wires of a passive system – this solution seems an untidy and costly madness.

You could gouge out channels in your walls for wires to hide in, mount the satellites on funky wall brackets, and plug them in to custom install-style sockets if you wanted – they'll look smart as hell – but I just cannot see that happening with a system of this size and price.

Active lifestyle

In the streamlined world of modern AV, the wires needed here are a major issue, but one that has always been there with active speakers. The benefit of the active design is that cabinets can be made smaller, and efficiency and clarity is improved, but while these are indeed tiny, they lack level and depth; for all its tonal accuracy the output is just too weedy.

This Genelec system is beautiful to look out, but it's an awful lot of money for a very small slice of AV. Don't get me wrong, these boxes have nearfield monitoring accuracy, but they remain as exciting to me as a chisel. A well-made and sharp tool you use for work ●

AV/CV

Product:

Like a miniature Minotaur, these speakers are designed to a top-end active standard but are just very small

Position:

The smallest/affordable of Genelec's offerings

Peers:

Scandyna Micropod SE; M-Audio Studiophile BX5a deluxe; Behringer CE500A



HCC VERDICT

Genelec 6010A/5040A sub/sat
£1,500 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Accurate sound with clarity sufficient for a musician to use; exquisite looks

Lows: Fiddly to fit; kinda 'quiet' not 'loud' speakers

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Future of TV

LG's use of LED technology means the SL9000 series offers a peerless viewing experience

LG's new SL9000 Series TVs offer the thinnest sets and clearest picture, and they are incredibly energy-efficient.

The stylish SL9000, with its unique flush-fitting screen and dazzling LED backlighting, is only 29.3mm thick, yet still manages to provide astounding picture quality with a 3,000,000:1 contrast ratio. It's also efficient enough to shave up to 40 per cent off your energy bill.

Thanks to LG's ground-breaking LED technology and innovative design, the SL9000 series has been allowed to slim down and swap the restricting frame for a seamless single layer of glass, which fits flush just like an infinity swimming pool.

There are 42in and 47in models available, both of which come fully equipped with four HDMI ports to hook up your Blu-ray player and other devices. There's even Bluetooth compatibility, to wirelessly beam your latest snaps and music to the full-HD 1080p screen.

In short, this is the ultimate hi-def experience for your home. Brilliant.

The details

A Frameless design

The SL9000's unique, single-layer design virtually eliminates the space between the screen and bezel, for a seamless look

B Ultra-slim

LEDs around the perimeter of the frame enable the SL9000 to be just 29.3mm thick

C Entertainment hub

With four HDMI ports, USB (with HD Movie playback), Bluetooth and PC input, you can connect the SL9000 to all your media

D Picture perfect

With a contrast ratio of 3,000,000:1, the SL9000 delivers ultra-crisp images and deeper blacks

E Power saver

LG LED technology saves you up to 40 per cent on your energy bills and the SL9000 is also certified by the Energy Saving Trust

WHICH LG TV IS RIGHT FOR YOU? STEP 2 of 7

Back a question Where will this TV be located in your home?

Livingroom

Best HD TV for your needs

PRODIGA 42PQ900H	LED 42SL9000	LED 47SL9000	LED 42L7700H	LED 42L6000H	LED 42L4000H	LED 37L7700H
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Click for review Click for review

The LG TV Buyers Guide

LG offers so many cutting-edge TV technologies, from integrated Freesat HD tuners bringing subscription-free hi-def channels to picture-enhancing 100Hz processing, that choosing the perfect set could be a little daunting. Don't panic, our simple step-by-step online guide will help you find your ideal LG TV in just a few quick clicks.

www.lge.co.uk/tvguide

Backseat driver

Want to wrap your flatscreen in a sonic shroud? **Chris Jenkins** does

A 2.1-channel speaker enhancement system for flatscreen TVs, Q Acoustics' Q-TV2 bolts to the back of the telly, and consists of a vibration-cancelled subwoofer with a downward-firing port, two side speakers which can be angled to hug the sides of the TV, and a built-in amplification system. Once assembled the whole rig should be practically invisible.

Fitting is achieved using VESA-standard mounting brackets and spacers. This model fits on sets from 30-42in, but versions for larger and smaller screens should be on the way.

Connection is via a line output, headphone output or optical digital output, so depending on the connection type, some sets will let you mute their internal speaker and control the Q-TV2 volume with the TV remote; if not you control the Q-TV2 volume with its own handset.

There's also a socket for input from an iPod or similar device; you don't have to have the TV switched on to use this.

Highs

- Sound improvement is immediate and obvious, adding 50W of bass in the 50Hz-180Hz range and 25W from the four 1in 180Hz-20kHz BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) side drivers.

- Once fitted the system does appear practically invisible and essentially becomes a part of your flatscreen.

Lows

- The overall sound is rather brash and bright, and other than a bass curve adjustment, there's no tone control.

- Could be a bit of a hard sell to someone who has already spent £600 or more on a TV.



Add on:
The Q-TV2 bolts onto the rear of your TV

HCC VERDICT

Q Acoustics Q-TV2
£300 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

XTZ ROOM ANALYZER → £150 Approx → www.xtz.se

Love your low frequencies

Matt Moule gets the best out of his subwoofer

The XTZ Room Analyzer is a very simple-to-use tool for improving the low-frequency response of your room and system. Out of the box comes a neat and solid USB soundcard, a poseable microphone and an assortment of leads. There's no software in the box – you have to go

and download it from the website (www.xtz.se).

Once connected to your AV system and a laptop or PC (XTZ recommends Windows XP), follow the onscreen instructions, place the mic at the given positions and press go. The unit will then generate a tone through your system, analyse it and then produce a graph showing the measured room response as it is – and what it could be if the suggested settings are implemented.

Planned upgrade releases include an RT60 reverb calculator and SPL function.

Highs

- As a tool for analysing your room and to tweak your system, the XTZ Room Analyzer can't be faulted. There's no need to get an expert in if you can read the manual and follow instructions.

- The generated results are clear and easy to read. Long cables are supplied, so even large rooms can be tackled.

- A real-time analysis function is included, most useful for EQ tweaking from 16hz-20khz.

- Relatively easy to achieve a good improvement in system sound.

Lows

- It's no substitute for proper room treatments like absorption or diffusion panels.

- The USB microphone isn't particularly sturdy; it's well built, but might fall over in a light gust of wind. We are nit-picking, though...

HCC VERDICT

XTZ Room Analyzer
£150 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



HOME CINEMA CHOICE JANUARY 2010

In Brief

The James Bond Omnibus: Volume 001
Titan Books
£15 Approx



This slick volume collects together the comic strip adaptations of eleven of Ian Fleming's original Bond novels that ran in the *Daily Express* between 1958-62. It's great to see how the creators reworked the stories to function in comic strip form – and how well they still read today.

1 2 3 4 5

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THE CONTENDERS

NEW KEF KHT2005.3 K1

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The latest batch of KEF's ever-popular 'egg' speakers have instant appeal

NEW MONITOR AUDIO VECTOR AV

£650 Approx

Handsome cabinets sporting MA's signature alloy tweeters make up the new Vector system

NEW TANNOY MERCURY F CUSTOM/TS801

£800 Approx

Tannoy's bad boys are the biggest of the bunch and a powerful sub promises potent bass

NEW WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10 HCP

£650 Approx

A classic bookshelf hi-fi speaker joined by a centre and subwoofer in a 5.1 package

With slimline TVs fitted to the wall and Blu-ray players mere slithers of tech, the traditional floorstanding speaker is beginning to look a little incongruous and takes up valuable space. No surprise, then, that an avalanche of slinky sub/sat systems has all but buried it in the sub-£1,000 stakes. These lifestyle solutions provide the same 5.1-channel action, but through smaller cabinets that rely more on the subwoofer to deliver the low frequencies. *HCC* has assembled a quartet of space-saving solutions from some of the world's leading audio brands to find out who has the ability to make small speakers sing...

The four systems pitted against each other here solve the problem of how to deliver home cinema sound while retaining distinct design flair. Therefore, all of them rely on smaller satellite speakers to supply the five channels of surround sound, and a subwoofer to take care of the mid/low bass frequencies, as well as the dedicated .1 LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel delivered by soundtracks.

Features

In terms of features, there is little to separate our grouptest contenders.

KEF probably pushes the sub/sat concept the furthest, with its KHT2005.3 K1 system. It's built around tiny satellites with overtly stylised cabinets that'll fit into any lounge (and can be swivelled on their bases for crude room equalisation). The Monitor Audio Vector, Wharfedale Diamond 10 HCP and Tannoy Mercury F Custom arrays all use more conventional bookshelf designs to deliver the goods in

a compact way; and all but the big Tannoy boxes have standard bracket fittings at the rear for mounting on the wall.

The subwoofers in each case are intended to be pushed to the side of the room, or even behind the sofa. If your sub is set up correctly, you shouldn't be able to tell where it is – such is the non-directional nature of really low-frequency sound waves. Each of the four subwoofers has a variable crossover point, volume and auto power up. The Wharfedale woofer is notable for using a 10in driver – the other three all pack an

8in version. The Tannoy is a curious beast, with a top-mounted LCD display allowing for advanced equalisation controls, and an IR sensor for remote control. Yet Tannoy doesn't offer a dedicated remote – you'll need to supply a learning one of your own.

Design

Obviously, the aesthetics of these systems are very important. They are marketed as lifestyle solutions, and each has a definitive style. However, the build quality across the board is reassuringly high.

Most impressive in the fashion stakes are the KEF eggs, with their sculpted oval cabinets harbouring a single drive unit. This is a mid-bass driver with an independent tweeter at the centre, and it's the secret of KEF's success in the sub/sat field. Dubbed a Uni-Q array, it's able to deliver the full frequency range from a single point source, which gives you a very cohesive sound even from a small speaker like this.

FEATURES

Round-up: There's never going to be much variation feature-wise in affordable 5.1 sub/sat systems. The Tannoy set annoys due its lack of wall-brackets, but makes up for it with its tweakable subwoofer

Monitor Audio Vector: 1 2 3 4 5

Wharfedale Diamond 10 HCP: 1 2 3 4 5

KEF KHT2005.3 K1: 1 2 3 4 5

Tannoy Mercury FC Custom: 1 2 3 4 5

KEF KHT2005.3 K1 → £700 Approx → www.kef.com/gb



In brief

KEF makes massive floorstanding home cinema speakers, but its distinctive eggs, as they're affectionately known, were the original smallscale style solution and paved the way for a myriad of curiously-shaped compact cabinets.

This is the latest and most affordable incarnation of the eggs in KEF's current range. The secret to their success has been KEF's concentric driver array, which places the tweeter inside the mid-bass driver and therefore allows for a much smaller cabinet. Meanwhile,

the ridged alloy shell – with its absence of parallel walls – reduces interference from vibration or internal standing waves.

The fact that they look as round and appealing as a handful of Smarties obviously hasn't harmed sales either.

Eggcellent: KEF's black, curved satellites are very living room-friendly

Monitor Audio always sends its speakers off in a smart finish and in this case the Vector's attractive, curved cabinets and beautifully tactile rubber finish all proved a big hit in my house. The curve in the enclosure limits the build up of unwanted internal standing waves, while the glossy black baffle is designed to match your flatscreen TV – assuming that it's black, of course. A seamless construction has been achieved by fixing the driver assembly to the rear of the speaker and avoiding the need for any visible

DESIGN

Round-up: The KEF and Monitor Audio sets probably have the highest Wife Acceptance Factor (WAF) here – and that is often a key point of a sub/sat system. The Tannoy cabinets are boxier and lack finesse. Build quality throughout our group test is excellent

Monitor Audio Vector: 1 2 3 4 5

Wharfedale Diamond 10 HCP: 1 2 3 4 5

KEF KHT2005.3 K1: 1 2 3 4 5

Tannoy Mercury FC Custom: 1 2 3 4 5

bolts or screws. This also gives a rigid cabinet that should be less affected by vibration.

The more conventional-looking Wharfedale and Tannoy speakers are simply MDF cabinets with two-way driver assemblies, but both seem well glued together. The Wharfedale's attention-grabbing steel rims look like a throwback to the brand's lairy in-car gear, but you have to admire the engineering and fabric grills.

The larger Tannoy cabinets do look a little clumsy in this company and the wood-effect vinyl is less convincing than Wharfedale's, at least in the pale applewood sample I ended up with – a darker oak option is available. Still, they too are well made and their larger enclosure volume should make it possible to generate a warmer, bassier sound than their smaller rivals.

Performance

All these systems are from manufacturers with proven track

records, and, unsurprisingly, each one manages to deliver convincing and cohesive surround sound in a small room.

The KEF package offers the most flexibility when it comes to installation. Sporting the smallest satellites, it'll suit pretty much all rooms and TVs, and the supplied stands allow some movement and will even screw to the wall. The smooth tone will have wide appeal, too. Small speakers often suffer from a splashy treble, but the KHT's metal dome tweeters have a softer edge, yet still capable of picking out very fine detail. Combined with an equally descriptive mid-band, it's an engaging sound that doesn't jar at high volumes.

Quantum of Solace, Bond's last outing, is still my Blu-ray test disc of choice thanks to its immaculate DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack. It has moments of pure bombastic audio hooliganism, yet delivers subtle, well-placed sonics too. It certainly shows off the KEF's

MONITOR AUDIO VECTOR AV → £650 Approx → www.monitoraudio.co.uk



In brief

These chunky boxes may come with an entry-level price tag but they major on looks and build quality. The V10 and V20 speakers have curves in all the right places, plus glossy black bezels to complement your television and a curiously tactile rubber finish that'll make your friends want to stroke 'em. They also use Monitor Audio's distinctive gold C-CAM tweeters behind their fixed metal grilles.

You could mount these cabinets on your wall using standard wall-brackets (not included), but with their ports at the back, they like just a little room behind them to breathe.

They're a tad larger than Monitor Audio's tiny Radius speakers, but still compact by most standards, and it's worth noting that the dinky Vector subwoofer is the smallest LFE-pusher on test in our group.

Don't be fooled: Although the centre speaker has two baffles either side of the mid-range, only one of them hides a tweeter

attributes perfectly. The satellites and identical centre speaker are all accurate enough to deliver clear dialogue and leap between the quiet office scenes and edgy action sequences without straining their compact cabinets. Crucially, though, the opening chapter, which sees 007 roaring away from assorted bad guys in his *de rigueur* Aston Martin DBS, actually had me reaching to turn the volume up and not down. This is a particularly noisy scene, with barrages of machine gun fire, smashing glass and scraping metal, and on a poor sound system it can be pretty uncomfortable to listen to at a decent volume. To its credit, the KEF's smoother presentation takes the edge off the treble, but still retains all the impact and excitement.

However, with the treble smoothed out, the KEF's high-end detail talents take a bit of a battering, and when it comes to the Jack Black and Alicia Keys theme tune, I wanted a little more edge to the guitar and

slightly more scale to the orchestral pieces. It's hard not to like the easy-going nature of the KEF KHT set but a little more punch in the bass and bite in the treble wouldn't go amiss.

Monitor Audio's Vector speakers use the brand's distinctive gold C-CAM tweeters to find even more top-end detail. Although they sound brittle from the box, they soon mellow and give a slightly more revealing upper-end than the KEFs, while finding an equally open mid-band and reassuringly deep bass. In short, this system delivers across the frequency range and has a more exciting sound as a result.

The raucous Bond car chase through the echoing tunnel sounds edgier, but it is meant to jangle your nerves to some extent and **the Vector array gives Bond's supercar a real snarl that makes the sequence even more visceral.** The cute Monitor Audio subwoofer looks harmless and

it doesn't summon quite as much deep bass as, particularly, the Wharfedale offering, but it's punchy and dynamic and if you turn it up a notch, it keeps good time with its satellite siblings; the overall soundstage knits together slightly more successfully than any of the other packages.

Monitor Audio's system is a hit musically, too. There's more reverb in the guitar and bounce to the QoS intro track than the others, and just the right amount of splash in the cymbals.

With their size advantage, the Tannoy Mercurys definitely make an impressive 5.1 surround system, especially since Tannoy upgraded the rear speakers from its FR to FI models to match the front pair – but for the same package price. You don't need a particularly huge amp to make these boxes deliver a big sound either.

The 5in paper cone woofers reach lower than the smaller speakers of Tannoy's rivals can manage, giving >

TANNOY MERCURY F CUSTOM/TS801 → £800 Approx → www.tannoy.com



In brief

As the biggest boys in this roundup of compact systems, Tannoy's boxy Mercury speakers aren't the easiest to accommodate, but if you can fit them around your flatscreen, they have an inherent sonic advantage, as it's easier to muster

a beefier sound from a larger enclosure.

The cabinets themselves seem to have a reasonably robust MDF construction and what they lack in style, they at least make up for in dynamic range. Being able to reach lower frequencies than the other

system's smaller speakers means they rely less on the subwoofer, which is a very compact forward-firing affair. The centre channel is catered for by a dedicated design with two 4in mid-range drivers. All in all, it's a more traditional solution capable of good results.

Chunky: Tannoy's Mercury system is quite large for a small-room sub/sat array

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Final standings

These sexy sub/sat systems prove that you don't have to surround yourself with floorstanders to experience real home cinema sonics. Despite their compact nature, none miss any of the action and they won't look out of place in a smart living room. Separating them is no easy task.

If you have the space for it, the Tannoy system rewards with copious bass and an exciting top end, but it lacks finesse in the midrange and sounds bright in the wrong home cinema setup.

The KEF solution is the simplest to accommodate and the easiest on the eye, so it's no surprise they've been as successful as they have. The easy-going, sweet sound is delightful, but KEF's entry-level eggs aren't the most expressive and they've just been pipped on performance this time.



The Wharfedale Diamond 10s have enough deep bass for a large room and real scale and treble detail. They're also the most musical of the bunch, but some might find them not quite visceral enough. It's therefore the Monitor Audio speakers

that emerge triumphant. The wall-mountable design is easy to fit around your TV, their rugged build quality is superb and above all, the sound quality with hi-res film soundtracks is thrilling. Well worth auditioning ●

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Monitor Audio Vector
£650 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Appealing design; sweet treble, good scale/separation
Lows: Could sound too bright with the wrong amp

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

V10/V20 (satellites)

Drive units: 4in MMP II bass driver, 1in gold C-CAM tweeter

Frequency response: 65Hz-30kHz

Sensitivity: 85dB

Power handling: 80W

Dimensions: 235(h) x 145(w) x 170(d)mm

Weight: 2.17kg

Vector (subwoofer)

Drive unit: 8in long-throw woofer

Frequency response: 40Hz-150Hz

Onboard power: 100W

Dimensions: 320(h) x 280(w) x 180(d)mm

Weight: 10.8kg

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Wharfedale Diamond 10 HCP
£650 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Powerful subwoofer; exciting treble; highly musical
Lows: A little bright at high volume; conventional design

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Diamond 10.1 (front/rear)

Drive units: 5in Kevlar mid/bass; 1in dome tweeter

Frequency response: 48Hz-24kHz

Sensitivity: 86dB

Power handling: 20-100W

Dimensions: 236(h) x 145(w) x 165(d)mm

Weight: 5.2kg each

Diamond 10.CC (centre)

Drive units: 2 x 4in Kevlar mid/bass; 1in dome tweeter

Frequency response: 75Hz-24kHz

Sensitivity: 88dB

Power handling: 15-120W

Dimensions: 236(h) x 145(w) x 165(d)mm

Weight: 3.5kg

Diamond 10.MX-SUB (subwoofer)

Drive unit: 10in Kevlar

Onboard power: 150W

Frequency response: 35Hz-110Hz

Dimensions: 330(h) x 330(w) x 370(d)mm

Weight: 17.8kg

2ND



HCC VERDICT

KEF KHT2005.3 K1
£700 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Compact cabinets; distinctive styling; smooth sound
Lows: Lacks some scale and excitement; limited bass

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

KHT2005.3 (satellites)

Drive units: 4in Uni-Q array; 0.7in aluminium tweeter

Frequency response: 80Hz-27kHz

Sensitivity: 88dB

Power handling: 100W

Dimensions: 228(h) x 130(w) x 150(d)mm

Weight: 2.0kg

KUBE-1 (subwoofer)

Drive unit: 8in long-throw woofer

Frequency response: 38Hz-150Hz

Onboard power: 200W

Dimensions: 295(h) x 295(w) x 295(d)mm

Weight: 9.6kg

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Tannoy Mercury FC Custom
£800 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Impressive scale; warm tone; powerful bass
Lows: Brittle treble; no wall-mounting option, staid design

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Mercury F1 Custom (satellites)

Drive units: 5in multi-fibre cone; 1in Nitro-Urethane dome tweeter

Frequency response: 55Hz-30kHz

Sensitivity: 88dB

Power handling: 100W

Dimensions: 300(h) x 170(w) x 220(d)mm

Weight: 4.0kg

Mercury F1 Custom (centre)

Drive units: 2 x 4in mid-bass; 1in tweeter

Frequency response: 38Hz-20kHz

Sensitivity: 90dB

Power handling: 140W

Dimensions: 150(h) x 430(w) x 170(d)mm

Weight: 5.3kg

TS801 (subwoofer)

Drive unit: 8in long-throw woofer

Frequency response: 40Hz-150Hz

Onboard power: 200W

Dimensions: 300(h) x 300(w) x 280(d)mm

Weight: 9.8kg

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Toon wars

Star Wars: The Clone Wars – The Complete Season One → All-region BD → Warner Home Video

Can this animated series reignite our love affair with George Lucas' sci-fi franchise? Turn to page 113 to find out...

HCC Ratings key

Star Wars	1 2 3 4 5
Star Trek	1 2 3 4 5
Ziggy Stardust	1 2 3 4 5
Freddie Starr	1 2 3 4 5
Stars In Their Eyes	1 2 3 4 5





The rabbit didn't stand a chance



Artificial intelligence

This film has plenty of guns, girls and explosions – but no soul

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

manages to undo all of the good work done by its enjoyable predecessor. Rushed into production to beat the 2008 writer's strike, it's a bloated mess, devoid of any decent characterisation, emotional involvement or coherent storyline. And while it delivers on sheer bot-tastic spectacle, there's also a worrying amount of misogyny and racial stereotyping for a flick mainly aimed at young 'uns.

Mark Craven on picture: This AVC 1080p encode is pure demo-fodder – packed with detail, intricate textures, superb blacks and rich colour reproduction. Check out the night-time chase through the streets of Shanghai (Chapter 1) to see the image hold together under the toughest conditions, or Chapter 9's daylight forest brawl where you can pick out every bit of CG detailing.

Steve May on sound: The disappointments pile high around *Revenge of the Fallen*. While the original's soundtrack delivered technical and creative highs, the

sequel's staggers around like a noisy drunk. The most crushing blow is the score – or rather lack of one. The original Steve Jablonsky theme (with more than a nod to the work of Hans Zimmer) was key to the drama and pace of the first outing, but here it's used merely as an afterthought between Linkin Park tracks. Ultimately, it's drowned out by a ceaseless tide of metallic SFX effects and lame 'toon dialogue. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix has its moments, but just trying to keep up with this sonic storm is a chore.

Anton van Beek on extras: The only bit of Blu-ray exclusive content on Paramount's two-disc set is an interactive 'bot customisation feature, which is good for about, ooh, six seconds of your time. The chat track from director Michael Bay and writers Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman is far more worthwhile, and the *Making of...* doc on Disc Two is invaluable.

Overseen by legendary DVD Producer Charles de Lauzirika and running for 135 minutes, it'll tell you everything you could ever want to know about the film's production.



HCC VERDICT

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen – 2-Disc Special Edition Paramount → All-region BD (US Import) → £22 Approx (www.movietyme.com)

We say: Hard to fault on a purely technical basis, but the film is as soulless as its robot characters

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Public Enemies: Special Edition

Universal → R2 DVD
£20 Approx (HMV exclusive)



Depression-era bank robber John Dillinger is the focus of this Michael Mann crime flick and the result is

another classic from a master of the genre. His now trademark mix of film and digital video breathes fresh life into a period of history already extensively covered by Hollywood cinema. The DVD's anamorphic 2.40:1 is detailed, if prone to the occasional artefact, and the DD5.1 sonics are wonderfully aggressive. This HMV-exclusive two-disc set includes a director's commentary and five featurettes as extras. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Brüno

Universal → R2 DVD
£20 Approx



Sacha Baron Cohen tries to repeat the success of *Borat*, this time with his flamboyant Austrian

fashionista Bruno taking centre stage. The format is identical, with Cohen's comedy creation participating in unscripted stunts with celebrities, politicians and members of the public, all tied together by a narrative about finding fame in the US.

Universal's anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer faultlessly replicates the documentary-style visuals, but the DD5.1 audio is front-heavy. Extras include a commentary and an hour of deleted/extended scenes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Hangover

Warner Home Video → R2 DVD
£20 Approx



Probably the Summer's biggest surprise in box office terms, Todd Phillips' comedy about three

groomsmen trying to find their about-to-be-wed chum after a wild Las Vegas stag do remains equally hilarious second time around. Like *Brüno*, the 5.1 Dolby mix is rather front-heavy, but the anamorphic 2.35:1 image is bright and cinematic. Extras are a disappointing, consisting of just a 15-minute behind-the-scenes featurette, a short bit of improv and a gag reel. Unfortunately for DVD owners, all the best supplementary features have been saved for the Blu-ray release. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs

20th Century Fox → Region B BD
£29 Approx



Following the poor second outing, *Ice Age 3* returns the franchise to its former glory with this fun tale of the hairy heroes discovering a lost world where dinosaurs still rule.

As with the previous movies, the BD is a real stunner, with gorgeous AVC 1.78:1 visuals and aggressive DTS-HD MA 7.1 audio that'll be used as showroom material for the foreseeable future. Cracking extras include a chatty commentary from the animators, featurettes, Scrat shorts, an engrossing *Storybook Maker* feature, and DVD and Digital Copies of the film. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Jump to it!

Luc Besson gives Hollywood a free-run for its money

District 13: Ultimatum

is yet another entertaining slice of Luc Besson-produced French action cinema – much like the 2004 original, in fact. This time around free-running idealist Leito (parkour legend David Belle) and hard-hitting cop Damien (Cyril Raffaelli) use their skills for leaping around and hitting people to foil a corrupt government plan to demolish the D13 ghetto – with everybody still inside. While it's not the most original plot, the stunts and fights are spectacular.

Rik Henderson: Momentum brings *D13: U* to Blu-ray with a crisply-rendered, intricately detailed VC-1 2.35:1 encode that should have the film's fans jumping over walls and rooftops for joy. The palette isn't what anyone would call natural, often employing the bleached-out visual style that seems so popular in action movies these days, but colour fidelity and contrast levels seem spot on.

Steve May: Besson's high-octane parkour punch-up sports two DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks – one in the original French, the other an English dub. Given the ludicrous voice casting in the dub, the former proves the wisest viewing choice, but the soundstage is fully used throughout on both iterations, with riffing beats, concussive explosions and automotive squeals mixed together to create a delicious, headache-inducing,



Pierre needed a hand getting his washing off the line



bisque. There's no shortage of entertaining action set-pieces to stress your system, but it's worth noting that the French dialogue has a slightly reverberated live quality on some interior scenes, which I found a tad distracting.

Anton van Beek: The extra features on this Blu-ray platter are adequate, but nothing more. The 27-minute *Making of...* and 35-minute *Production Diary* are your ports of call for in-depth behind-the-scenes info, although there is some crossover between the two. The remaining goodies are a reel of nine deleted/extended scenes (including lengthier versions of two of the film's biggest fights), a music video, teaser trailer and theatrical trailer. Somewhat annoyingly, all of the bonus content is presented in 576p resolution.



HCC VERDICT

District 13: Ultimatum
Momentum → Region B BD
£25 Approx

We say: This entertaining action sequel delivers more of the same on a good-looking Blu-ray disc

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

War! What is it good for?

Four-hour epic love stories, for starters

Gone with the Wind is the ultimate Hollywood classic. Epic in length and scale, this 70-year-old adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's best-selling Civil War romance novel is a hymn to filmmaking excess and ambition. Thankfully, the spectacle is never allowed to overwhelm the story, probably why it continues to be held in such high regard – and made more than \$1.4 billion at the box office (in today's money).

Mark Craven: *GWTW* continues Warner's winning streak for restoring Hollywood classics for the hi-def age. Based on the 2004 Ultra Resolution restoration done for that year's Collector's Edition DVD release, the BD takes advantage of a brand-new 8K digital source that is bursting with detail and captures the robust colours of the three-strip Technicolor source material. Not every shot is perfect (as always, opticals such as titles and dissolves are excessively grainy), but this is easily the best this film has ever looked.

Steve May: Much like *The Wizard of Oz*, reviewed opposite, the soundtrack for *GWTW* is a damage limitation exercise, albeit one that earns top marks. The original monophonic soundtrack is presented in 5.1 TrueHD, but is spread gently across the L/C/R, creating a predominantly stereo effect. It's dynamically thin but surprisingly free of sibilance. The 5.1 mix brings more attention to itself during scenes like the shelling of Atlanta (Chapter 20), but it's still somewhat subdued. For purists there is also an original monophonic option, delivered via Dolby Digital 1.0. Such is the care attached to the wider remix, it would



Face it Scarlett, he just doesn't give a damn



probably be my listening track of choice – it certainly makes the most of Max Steiner's iconic score – but there's something satisfying

about the more modest option.

Anton van Beek: Most of the extras in this two-disc set will be familiar to owner's of the Four-Disc Collector's Edition DVD. Everything from that mammoth set is present here, including a commentary by film historian Rudy Behlmer, two-hour retrospective documentary, restoration featurette, trailer archives and much, much more.

New extras for the BD are a 68-minute doc about the big films of 1939 (there were loads as it turns out), a featurette about the film's enduring legacy and the brilliant 1980 TV movie *Moviola: The Scarlett O'Hara War* starring Tony Curtis.



HCC VERDICT

Gone with the Wind: 70th Anniversary Collector's Edition → Warner Home Video All-Region BD → £23 Approx

We say: An epic movie done true justice on Blu-ray

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

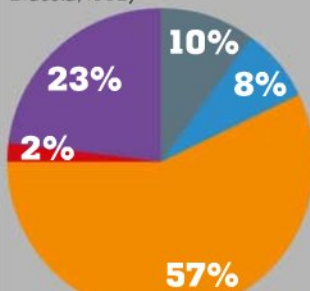
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

We asked you...

Which of these is the best bigscreen *Dracula*?

- Max Schreck (*Nosferatu* 1922)
- Bela Lugosi (*Dracula*, 1931)
- Christopher Lee (*Horror of Dracula* et al, 1958 onwards)
- Frank Langella (*Dracula*, 1979)
- Gary Oldman (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*, 1992)



From www.homecinemachoice.com

Blood: The Last Vampire

Pathé → R2 DVD
£16 Approx



This live action adaptation of Hiroyuki Kitakubo's anime short replicates the look of

the popular 'toon, but struggles when it comes to expanding the thin storyline into something more weighty. That said, the action scenes impress (despite an abundance of lame CG blood) and if watching Japanese chicks swing swords around is your type of thing, there are worse ways to spend 90 minutes. The DVD boasts a colourful anamorphic 2.35:1 transfer and punchy DD5.1, but extras are limited to mini-featurettes, a gallery and trailers. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Land of the Lost

Universal → R2 DVD
£20 Approx



Based on the 1970s TV show of the same name (which is pretty much unknown in the UK), Will Ferrell's

latest movie is very odd indeed. Too adult for kids and too juvenile for grown-ups, *Land of the Lost* is the most deranged Summer blockbuster to ever escape from a major Hollywood studio, which probably makes it a shoo-in for future cult movie status. The anamorphic 1.85:1 transfer and Dolby Digital 5.1 audio are both excellent, possibly because there's oodles of disc space available; all you get in the way of extras is miserable seven minutes of deleted scenes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Year One

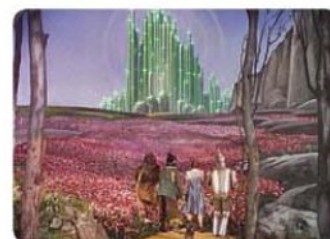
Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£22 Approx



In this high-concept comedy Jack Black and Michael Cera star as a couple of idiots kicked out of their

tribe, leading them to wander through numerous events from the Old Testament. Fair enough, but somebody should tell writer/director Harold Ramis that comedies set over two millennia ago don't have to have pre-historic jokes Painfully unfunny and seeming to last forever, *Year One* at least looks epic thanks to a superb AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode, but the DTS-HD 5.1 audio is unadventurous. The extras include BD-Live MovieIQ and Cinechat functionality, but why bother? **RH**

1 2 3 4 5



The wonderful wizard of Oz

For this superb hi-def release, there's no place like home cinema

The Wizard of Oz deserves a place in everyone's film collection. It's a 70-year old Technicolor classic that has it all – loveable leads, hiss-able villains, memorable songs, sumptuous sets, midgets, and a gripping story that sweeps you along for the ride as easily as the twister that picks up Dorothy's house and deposits it in L Frank Baum's fantastical world. Unmissable.

Mark Craven: From the opening shot it's easy to see the amount of effort that went into Warner's 8K restoration. Bursting with fine grain and unveiling a wealth of previously hidden detailing, it's a quantum leap over the quality of the previous (but still very impressive) 2005 DVD release. And when the movie shifts from sepia to its full Technicolor glory in Chapter 11, the vibrant colours will knock your ruby slippers off. As far as I can tell, it's as close to a truly filmic representation as you can get without having a 35mm print unspooling in your living room.

Steve May: There's no shortage of choice when it comes to audio investigation. The remastered *TWO* features a sympathetic, careful Dolby TrueHD 5.1 lossless mix, while buried in the Special Features is an Original Mono alternative (Dolby Digital 1.0) plus a separate Music and Foley Effects track (again DD1.0) which is surprisingly revealing (it's easy to imagine the Foley artists rustling their stuff as the film is projected before them).

The enterprise reveals astonishing restraint, and it's nothing short of a miracle that the film doesn't sound more sibilant and pitchy than it does. Warner's engineers have resisted the temptation to drop in ping-pong sound FX, and

the musical numbers are spread gently. The surround mix has been built from four channels – restored mono, two orchestra angles and the original music and effects track. The engineers have been mindful of adopting stereo opportunities only as they appear logically in the movie. For that reason I'd opt for the re-do rather than the original mono.

Bizarrely, the Restoration featurette, *Prettier than Ever*, which sets out to give A/B comparisons of the remix up to 5.1, is presented in stereo!

Anton van Beek: This three-disc set (two Blu-rays, plus a DVD) is crammed with extras, although most of them were included on the previous Collector's Edition DVD boxset. You get a commentary; various documentaries about the making of the film, its legacy and the people behind it; a featurette about the remastering process; outtakes and deleted scenes; test footage; a karaoke-style Sing-Along mode; 18 stills galleries, alternate audio recordings of some of the tunes; home movies; a TV movie about L Frank Baum; and a plethora of archival trailers and related promotional shorts. Even better, for any true cinephile, is the inclusion of five earlier silent ...Oz movies and a short animated effort from 1933.

Perhaps the only disappointment is that the DVD serves up a standard-def copy of the film, rather than the six-hour (!) documentary about the glory days of MGM studios that accompanies the US BD release. In fact, real Oz-heads might want to import the region-free American version, which also adds a 52-page coffee-table book and a collectible *Wizard of Oz* watch!

Sing a rainbow: Warner's restored *Wizard of Oz* delivers a cavalcade of vibrant colours



HCC VERDICT

The Wizard of Oz: Sing-Along-Edition → Warner Home Video
All-region BD → £23 Approx

We say: A spectacular hi-def package for one of the best-loved movies ever made. Simply wonderful

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Star Wars: The Clone Wars

comes as a welcome surprise after the lacklustre live-action prequels, and the theatrical CG 'toon, that preceded this animated series.

Continuing the story of the Republic's battle against the Separatist armies, each episode delivers a superb mix of concise storytelling, excellent animation and epic action sequences (with the latter managing to get your blood pumping while still moving the plot forward – unlike, say, *Attack of the Clones*' utterly superfluous Droid Factory sequence which stuck out like a sore thumb). After fearing the worst for so long, it looks like this CG series is the new hope the *Star Wars* franchise desperately needed.

Mark Craven: There's little to fault about this CG toon's Blu-ray box set, picture-wise. All 22 episodes are presented in VC-1 2.35:1 encodes, and the widescreen imagery is constantly impressive. The animation doesn't reach the heights of the best of Pixar or DreamWorks, but ...*Clone Wars* still wows with its robust colours and excellent detailing. The only downside I can see is some minor colour banding, but otherwise this is terrific HD fun from start to finish.

Steve May: Those coming to this CG-tastic series after its screening on Sky Premier HD will be disappointed to learn that the audio remains a lossy DD5.1 mix. Quite why the series hasn't been upgraded to lossless for BD is a mystery. That's not to say the series isn't sonically fun, though. Episodes are lushly



Tempers frayed at the B&Q lighting sale

scored, dialogue spreads across the L/C/R, galactic flybys and weapons-fire pan around the soundstage, and the LFE rumbles on cue. Standout episodes, such as *Rookies*, are undeniably cinematic in sonic design, but it's just that DD5.1 delivery is so... retro.

Anton van Beek: Each episode is accompanied by a short (five-to-eight-minute) behind-the-scenes featurette, while six of the episodes are presented in longer Director's Cut form. There's also a Jedi Temple Archive on each disc, allowing you to check out a mix of 2D concept art and 3D animation tests and CG models.

Disc One also hosts a sneak peak at Season Two, a trailer for the *Republic Heroes* videogame and a promo for the official *Star Wars* website. Bonus video content on the discs is in 1080i.



HCC VERDICT

Star Wars: The Clone Wars – The Complete Season One
Warner Home Video
All-Region BD → £50 Approx

We say: Aimed primarily at kids, this CG toon is actually a treat for *Star Wars* fans of all ages

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The Prisoner: The Complete Series

Network → Region B BD/R2 DVD
£60 Approx



This six-disc (four BDs and two DVDs) set containing Patrick McGeehan's mind-twisting 17-part

series is nothing less than spectacular. The Blu-ray discs are given over to the show itself and, thanks to the restored 35mm source material, the AVC 1.33:1 encodes are mind-blowing in terms of clarity, sharpness and colour. Audio is equally good courtesy of the inclusion of both a 5.1 remix and the original mono mixes (both, sadly lossy). The BDs serve up seven audio commentaries, but the majority of the extras can be found on the DVDs. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Devil May Cry: The Animated Series

Manga → Region B BD
£30 Approx



Toons based on videogames don't carry the same kind of stigma as their live-action brethren, but that doesn't mean they're any good either; this 12-part series based on Capcom's popular slice 'em up is for die-hards only. It certainly looks very nice (aided by the BD's sharp 1080p encode), but the storyline fails to grab attention and the action itself seems curiously curtailed. The two-disc set serves up all 12 episodes, with a choice of TrueHD 5.1 Japanese and English dub audio, plus some lame extras. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Smallville: The Complete Eighth Season

Warner → All-region BD
£60 Approx



Saddled with cumbersome storytelling, few of the key cast members and a middle-aged man playing a young version of the Man of Steel, this eighth season of *Smallville* feels like a shadow of its former self. The VC-1 1.78:1 encodes for the episodes are oddly haphazard – some look great, others suffer from obvious artefacting – and (as usual with a Warner TV BD) there's no lossless audio, just vanilla DD5.1. Extras are deleted scenes, an interview, featurette, and a pair of chat tracks. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Sanctuary: The Complete First Season

Contender → R2 DVD
£40 Approx



I should love this Amanda Tapping TV series, with its mash-up of traditional monster mythology (vampires, werewolves, etc) and geeky science. But this first season just doesn't grab me: its characters are humourless, the heavy use of green screen sets and CG monster effects is tiring, and it's all just too daft.

Still, this four-disc set looks fine (the show is shot digitally using RED cameras), with an atmospheric DD5.1 soundtrack, and the extras are worth taking refuge in. **SM**

1 2 3 4 5

Heat

Warner → All-Region BD
£18 Approx



Michael Mann's films invariably dazzle with their visual style, and *Heat* is no exception – perfect cannon

fodder for a Blu-ray release then. Warner Home Video's VC-1 2.40:1 appears technically flawless, with jet blacks juxtaposed against bright peaks of white and blue, and deadly-sharp edges. The Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix is the perfect partner in crime, placing gunfire all around the soundfield with pin-point accuracy, even though some of the dialogue struggles to make itself heard. All the extras from the Special Edition DVD have been hijacked for this BD. Oh, and the film still rocks. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Trick 'r Treat

Warner → All-region BD (US Import)
£20 Approx (www.movietyrme.com)



Delayed for nearly two years, writer-director Michael Dougherty's horror anthology gets

an HD release and, amazingly, manages to live up to the hype. This joyfully wicked celebration of all-things Halloween flicks back and fourth between a quartet of interweaving stories (a trick that rewards further viewings) and, at a lean 82 minutes, guarantees that none outstay their welcome. The VC-1 2.35:1 encode is slick and polished, Dolby TrueHD 5.1 audio is suitably tense, and smart extras include a commentary, additional scenes and animated short. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Gremlins

Warner → All-Region BD
£18 Approx



Even if he'd never made another good film (and don't worry, he made *The 'burbs*, too) I'd

always have time for director Joe Dante thanks to this 1984 horror-comedy. Yet as loved as the film is, here in the UK we've only ever been given a barebones DVD release. Warner's new BD puts things right with a detailed and colourful (if very grainy) VC-1 1.85:1 1080p encode and a choice of Dolby TrueHD 5.1 and DD2.0 audio mixes. The disc also ports over all of the extras from the US Special Edition DVD, including a pair of commentaries and deleted scenes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Dawn of the Dead

Arrow Films → All-region BD/RO DVD
£18 Approx (HMV exclusive)



This new UK release (currently an HMV exclusive) is the best package yet for Romero's kick-ass

zombie sequel. It begins with a superb AVC 1080p encode of the theatrical cut of *DotD*, with a choice of DTS-HD MA 5.1 or LPCM 2.0 mixes, plus a pair of commentaries, the *Document of the Dead* documentary and a lengthy fan-film. The two other cuts of the movie ('Director's' and 'Argento') only merit a DVD each due to the quality of the source material, but they're accompanied by tremendous extras. The packaging is ace, too. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Pixel-perfect pugilism

Bigscreen biffery has never looked so good

Fight Club might have fizzled at the box office, but ten years later, David Fincher's incendiary adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's novel has engendered a cult following few other films could ever dream of. Visually spectacular, provocative and laced with self-deprecating humour, *Fight Club* remains a remarkable piece of movie magic that demands many viewings to be truly appreciated.

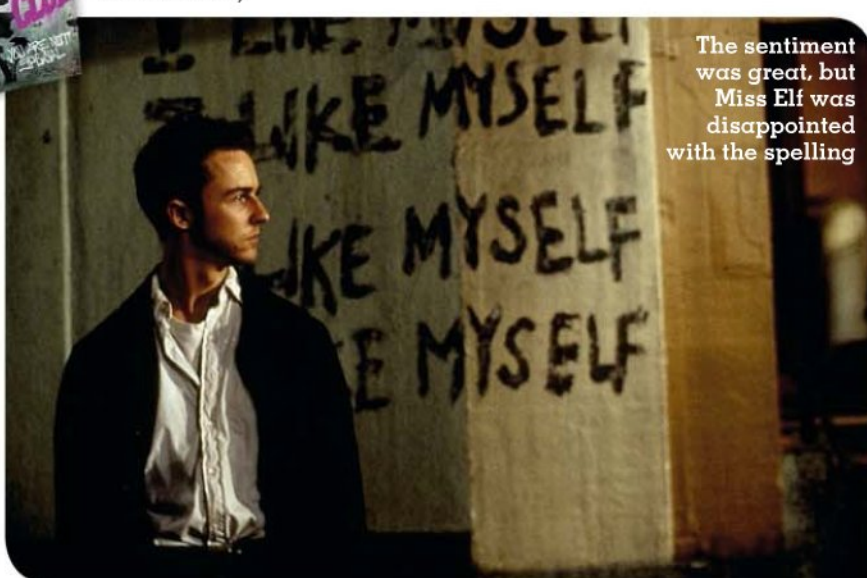
Mark Craven: Fincher's film is deliberately dark and sickly-looking, and it's been flawlessly brought into the hi-def world thanks to Fox's careful AVC 2.40:1 encode. The pervasive blacks are deep enough to get lost in, the washed-out colour palette is grimy and unsettling, detailing is bountiful and the natural film grain has been left unmolested.

Steve May: While *Fight Club*'s picture has been completely re-mastered for BD, the audio track is unchanged from the DVD Special Edition (the one in the iconic cardboard slipcase). The undeniable benefit now is that it is uncompressed. Ren Klyce's inspired mix (see our feature on p24) is finally available to be heard in 24bit resolution via DTS-HD MA 5.1, and it's a stunning aural experience. The soundtrack has such breadth and vigour it's difficult to pick out highlights. For a shocking standout sequence, there's the brutal face-mashing of Angel Face (Chapter 26) where the LFE slugs like a hammer; or for 360-degree drama dial up the car crash sequence, one chapter on. Wherever you go, *Fight Club* will leave you battered and bruised.

Anton van Beek: This 10th Anniversary Blu-ray release takes everything good from the old two-disc Special Edition DVD and adds a little

of its own hi-def magic to the mix, in the form of a hilarious clip from the Spike TV Awards and an in-depth interactive sound-mixing feature. Fans of the earlier DVD will be delighted to learn that all four of the commentary tracks are again featured, albeit now with the added bonus of a frighteningly thorough index, which means you can quickly locate specific topics being discussed.

Also packing a punch on Fox's BD are an extensive collection of behind-the-scenes vignettes (with multi-angle/audio functions and storyboards), seven deleted/alternate scenes, countless trailers, TV spots, PSAs and internet spots, plus six picture galleries (including storyboards for the entire film).



The sentiment was great, but Miss Elf was disappointed with the spelling



HCC VERDICT

Fight Club: 10th Anniversary Edition → 20th Century Fox
All-Region BD → £23 Approx

We say: We doubt Tyler Durden would approve, but you really must go and buy this Blu-ray right now!

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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LCD & PLASMA SCREENS



Philips 42PL9664 LCD TV

This new model features built-in Wi-Fi web access, full HD, 200Hz motion smoothing and with a cutting edge 1ms response time. Native contrast is 80,000:1, although the new Ambilight Spectra 2 rear-projecting coloured LEDs are claimed to give a further 'perceived' improvement in contrast. And at only 49mm thick, the 9664 is easily wall-mountable.



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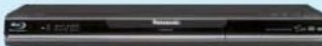
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Onkyo raises the bar once again in the competitive world of home cinema with its TX-SR607 which features Dolby ProLogic IIz support.



Denon AVR-2310

This award-winning A/V receiver combines fine specification, solid build with breathtaking low-level dynamics and detail.



Pioneer SC-LX82

Bringing studio quality sound to your living room. Pioneer's goal is for you to experience film and music just as the creators intended.

HI-FI SEPARATES

Pro-Ject Genie MKIII

Replacing the Genie 2, the MKIII version includes a new motor, more stable motor base and a new tone arm with traditional anti-skate. Supplied with an OM3e Ortofon cartridge fitted, the Genie MKIII is available in Standard Black with White, Piano Black and Red finish options available at extra cost.



Cyrus

Following the remarkable 'Servo Evolution' CD players, Cyrus has introduced a range of amplifiers featuring circuitry developed for its DAC XP. The 8 XP d and Pre XP d include digital inputs - ideal for playing music stored on your computer - while the entry model, 6 XP, is based on the 8 XP but without the digital option. All also include two-zone multiroom capability.



The award-winning 'Servo Evolution' CD players - CD6 SE, CD8 SE & CDX t SE/DAC X

Marantz CD/PM6003

This new CD and amplifier pairing continues Marantz's tradition of building superb budget products.



Arcam FMJ Series

Combining sleek design, flexible connectivity and a level of reproduction far beyond that of budget separates.



Leema Antila II CD Player & Tucana II Amplifier

With stunning sound quality and captivating good looks the new Antila II CD player features unique MD2 active differential multi-DAC converter technology.

The dual mono designed Tucana II uses three heavy-duty toroidal power transformers, has a refined bi-polar output stage and is capable of swinging over forty five amps of current for precise control of the speakers.



HI-FI & HOME CINEMA SPEAKERS

Monitor Audio Silver RX6 AV12

Using techniques and materials from the Platinum and Gold ranges, the Silver RX series of slimline hi-fi and home cinema speakers are available in a choice of real wood veneers and high-gloss piano finishes to complement any room. Also Available: Radius R90HD10



Spendor A5 and A6

The A5 offers exceptional performance in relation to its compact dimensions. New drive units ensure clear and natural mid-range and beautifully open treble. The A6 utilises technology developed whilst developing the ST loudspeaker with its asymmetrically sculptured tweeter faceplate and refined 18cm bass/mid driver.



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B&W Panorama
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B&W MT-25
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B&W MT-30
Award-winning 5.1 package including the PV-1 subwoofer.

Wharfedale Diamond 10.1

This 10th generation version of the '80's classic combines insight, precision and control along with fine build and finish.



Q Acoustics 2000 Cinema Pack

Smart styling complements the Q Acoustics' award-winning performance.



KEF KHT3005SE

Award-winning 5.1 speaker package available in high gloss black finish.



Dali Lektor

Dali complements its range with the Lektor 2. Only slightly larger than the award-winning Lektor 1, this new model represents outstanding value.



ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS

Denon D-M37DAB

Denon's micro systems are back. This award-winning model, available in silver or black, features a CD player, capable of reading MP3 and WMA discs, a DAB tuner, and 30W amplifier. **Optional** SC-M37 speakers.



Teac Reference 600

Award-winning system comprising the PD-H600 CD player and AG-H600DNT receiver. Features include both wired and wireless network connections for internet radio, a DAB tuner and a healthy 2 x 75 W power output.



Arcam Solo Mini

Award-winning integrated CD, Radio and Amplifier with iPod control via optional rLead/rDock.



B&W Zeppelin

This award-winning iPod docking station ticks all the boxes: it's beautiful, solid as a rock and sounds amazing!



Also Available: NEW Zeppelin Mini

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

At Sevenoaks, accessories are not an afterthought. Come and hear the difference the right accessories can make to your listening and viewing experience.



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Sonos BU250 Bundle

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Sony BDP-S760	£WEB	(SRP £399)
Denon DBP-1610	£369	(SRP £399)

A/V RECEIVERS

More at www.SSAV.com

Sony STR-DH800	£279	(SRP £349)
Denon AVR-1910	£WEB	(SRP £449)
Denon AVR-2310	£WEB	(SRP £799)
Pioneer SC-LX82	£WEB	(SRP £1899)

A/V SPEAKERS

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Q Acoustics 2000 Cinema Pack	£WEB	(SRP £549)
B&W MT-25	£949	(SRP £953)
B&W 685 Theatre	£1229	(SRP £1229)
Mon Audio Radius R90 HD10	£1269	(SRP £1272)

SCREENS

More at www.SSAV.com

Philips 32PFL7404	£579	(SRP £649)
Panasonic TX-L37S10	£599	(SRP £699)
Philips 42PFL9664	£WEB	(SRP £1499)
Samsung UE46B8000	£WEB	(SRP £2099)

HI-FI CD PLAYERS

More at www.SSAV.com

Marantz CD6003	£WEB	(SRP £299)
Arcam FMJ CD17	£WEB	(SRP £600)
Cyrus CD 6 SE	£899	(SRP £900)
Cyrus CD 8 SE	£1199	(SRP £1200)

HI-FI AMPLIFIERS

More at www.SSAV.com

Marantz PM6003	£WEB	(SRP £299)
Cyrus 6 XP	£899	(SRP £900)
Cyrus 8 XP d	£1499	(SRP £1500)
Leema Tucana II	£3399	(SRP £3425)

HI-FI SPEAKERS

More at www.SSAV.com

Wharfedale Diamond 10.1	£199	(SRP £199)
B&W 685	£369	(SRP £371)
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	£749	(SRP £750)
Spendor A6	£1989	(SRP £1995)

SYSTEMS

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Denon D-M37DAB	£199	(SRP £229)
Panasonic SC-BT200	£449	(SRP £499)
Arcam Solo Mini*	£749	(SRP £750)
Teac Reference 600*	£999	(SRP £1000)

*FREE WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.1 SPEAKERS

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Is it still good enough?

Hi there. I've just seen your review for the JVC DLA-HD1 projector from two years ago, and am trying to find out how this projector measures up with some of the newer models. For example, I found a place that sells the JVC DLA-HD1 and the new Epson TW4400 for around the same price. What would be a better choice?

Oren Harel, via email

The JVC model is a little old, but still a very good projector. Unfortunately, you haven't said what price you've found it available for – presumably around the £3,000 the Epson retails for. If so maybe you should turn your attention to the still-current JVC HD350. We've often said that the D-ILA technology of JVC's projectors delivers a more

cinematic picture than LCD models, because it doesn't require a dynamic iris to achieve good contrast levels. However, as always, we recommend getting a side-by-side demo and making a decision yourself.

What's that plug for?

I read the review of the NAD T747 receiver in HCC #174. In the photograph of the back panel I can see that the receiver has three component video inputs. Why does it need these? They don't carry any audio, surely?

Mark, via email

Although HDMI is the *de facto* standard for HD video and audio, analogue component video connections remain useful for other product you might have that predates the roll-out of HDMI kit. Component doesn't carry



JVC's DLA-HD1: old but good

audio – you'll want to run a separate digital audio input for sound and then pair the two in the AVR's menu system. It's also useful for delivering a progressive output from SD sources, such as the Nintendo Wii. Try it, you might like it....

Kit choice

I have a few questions and was hoping you could help. I am seeking a DVD player but ideally I want a multiregion DVD recorder that can play Blu-rays.

Now I have been told that it isn't possible to buy any DVD ➤



It's not all about black levels!

I was very interested to read your recent Star Letter (HCC #174) about the Pioneer Kuro because I was in the process of trying to decide whether to buy one myself (I know 'they are not being made any more' but several ads did list them). In the end, I decided *not* to buy one. Not because they are, or are not, the 'best/purest/Holy Grail/etc.' but because they did not suit my needs. Here's why..:

Trying to get the very best black levels is really important but only if you are going to be watching the TV in a darkened room. Otherwise any minor difference in black levels is going to be 'washed out' by the ambient light and therefore not noticeable. In my case, I only darken the room to watch movies using a projector. The plasma TV is for casual/everyday viewing which means the lights are on. Therefore, I am more interested in a screen that has good

contrast and is bright. While the Kuro has class-leading black levels and an excellent contrast ratio, your Labs report measured luminance at 14.06fl. This is well below other plasmas, many with luminance over 30fl (let alone LCD screens which are even brighter still). So in the end, I decided to postpone my plasma purchase a little longer. I may even (gasp) not buy another plasma but buy an LED LCD screen which seem to offer brightness without sacrificing black levels.

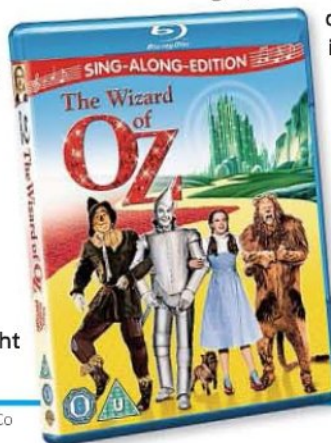
Am I wrong in thinking this way?
Ion Mitchell, Twickenham

Not at all, the latest generation of LED-backlight LCD screens are often

stunningly effective (see our Sharp LED review on p52), and are well worth auditioning. Yet, a decent black level is essential for any image if it is to have a tangible sense of depth. Plasma screens traditionally struggle to maintain apparent black levels in high ambient light, but they remain the most cinematic

of screen technologies when it comes to movie watching in controlled lighting.

Winner: Star Letter-writer Ion Mitchell wins a copy of *The Wizard of Oz: Sing-Along-Edition* Blu-ray courtesy of Warner Home Video Pictures UK. It's available to buy now, priced at £23 each.



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players which are Blu-ray and DVD recorders – the best I could hope for would be a DVD recorder, multiregion but not with Blu-ray. Is this the case?

Also I am a bit of a novice, so is Blu-ray just a Sony thing? *Matt, via email*

Blu-ray is an industry standard, not just a Sony thing. Sony is certainly one of its major supporters, and the company's PlayStation 3 console has helped it flourish, but Blu-ray is backed by most of the major electronics brands, film studios and retailers. So don't be scared about dipping your feet into the Blu pool.

As for the bit of kit you are after, we're afraid you're out of luck. Panasonic makes DVD/Blu-ray recorders, but these have Freesat tuners, not Freeview, and aren't multiregion. In fact, buying a multiregion DVD recorder isn't straightforward either – you'll have to consider either no-name brands or modded decks.

Apple bites back

Boo you, Mr Stevenson! I always take great pleasure at reading *HCC*, including your *Point Of View* column, which I always find interesting.

Yet, this time, you've let yourself wander way out of humorous opinion into insult, while at the same time showing an appalling ignorance – amazing coming from you.

First, saying that having a Apple-branded laptop is akin to declaring 'I'm an insecure herd-following badge snob' [see *HCC* #174] is insulting to the many thousands of Apple laptop users – including me and

probably quite a significant number of your readers.

If that is your opinion of users of Apple products, so be it – just don't be insulting while expressing it.

Second, saying that Apple hardware is 'twice the price, half the resolution, and only offer a tenth of the features of traditional manufacturers' is pure ignorance.

Apple hardware is hardly 'twice the price'. It's actually no more expensive than other computers of comparable specs, and if you include the operating system, the many apps that come with it, the quality of build, and yes, advanced design, I'd say that they are not so pricey after all. Not to mention that, after two years of professional use, I can still sell my MacBook at up to two thirds of its original price, which would hardly be the case with most PCs.

Saying that it's half the resolution probably refers to the res (720p) of the Apple TV. Yet Apple computers have always featured screens that are equal/better in resolution and quality than their competitors. If, and when, Apple releases an Apple-branded television, its screen will feature the best quality and resolution available at that time – amongst several novelties which probably won't be available on other brand's TV sets of any brand. I doubt Apple will venture into this area, but one never knows; they did with the iPhone, so why not after all...

Finally, saying that Apple's products offer only a tenth of the features of comparable bits of kit is a sign of your ignorance. I've always found Apple computers packed with

features, some not even available in rival machines. Apple was also the first to introduce things like Ethernet, Firewire, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth on consumer products.

Expressing your point of view is exactly what your section is all about, and why we like to read it every month, but you should build your opinions on facts, and avoid insulting some of your readers for the simple sake of being funny.

Paul Van Obberghen, Belgium

Richard Stevenson replies:

'Dear Paul, sorry to offend. I confess that calling all Apple users insecure herd-following badge-snob was outrageous. I suspect quite a few of them aren't insecure at all. Joke.'

'I must say, though, that your impassioned defence in the face of overwhelming evidence underlines the strength of the Apple brand and the dedication of its followers. It's just I have never got "it". I also confess there were other errors in my comment – e.g stating Macs were twice the price of PCs. I did some research and it is nearer three times.'

'I've been comparing notebooks of, say, Intel Core Duo, 4GB Ram, 320GB HDD and a 15in screen with all the wireless trimmings. In the PC camp we have, say, Toshiba's SAT L500 at £500, Samsung's NP-R519 at £450 or even the AMD-based Compaq CQ60 at £400. Buy an equivalent Apple MacBook Pro and you won't have much change out of £1,500. And what of software? In the Business and Office category alone a well-known internet retailer currently offers nearly 3000 Mac OS software packages – but a whopping 80,000 Windows OS ones.'

'Clearly Macs have merits that I have not got to grips with and I must be missing something.'

'[Sent from my iPhone]'

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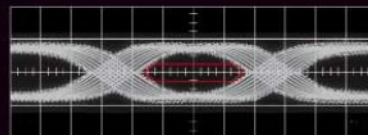
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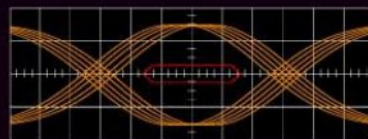
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How we test

Home Cinema Choice's hardware reviews combine the subjective opinion of our seasoned reviewers with hard technical data.

Chris Jenkins explains how the *HCC* Tech Labs work

HCC reviews tend to be a mixture of subjective opinion and objective data. While we value the subjective opinions of our highly experienced reviews team, we like to blend and balance their opinions with objective measurements. The *HCC* Tech Labs have been measuring AV equipment for nearly 20 years. It was originally conceived to evaluate the performance of VCRs and CRT TVs, and it is now routinely testing Blu-ray players and HD displays.

Interestingly, much of our first generation hardware is still in use (we maintain an irrational fondness for an oscilloscope used to determine the onset of clipping on amplifiers), although our more venerable hardware is now supplemented by new software and measurement methodologies. One thing remains unchanged though: our commitment to supply you with the best possible buying advice.

Virtual Tour

Our Tech Labs consist of two main facilities: a Viewing Room, and a Test Lab.

The Viewing Room is used mainly for testing TVs, projectors and speakers and has been designed to reproduce the conditions that are found in a typical mid-range home cinema setup. It was created by award-winning custom installers Pounds (www.poundstv.co.uk), and is completely light-proofed. While it is not designed to be sound-proof, it has been skinned in Acoustiblock and has been acoustically treated and tuned by the experts at RPG (www.rpg-europe.co.uk), using custom absorbers and diffusers. The room features multiple HDMI, component video and audio cable runs, as well as analogue and digital TV and satellite feeds, and has a resident 7.2

speaker system. Multiple screens can be fed the same source material simultaneously, courtesy of a Gefen 2-in-4-out HDMI switcher/splitter, for screen shootouts.

Number crunching

The Test Lab is used mainly for number-crunching DVD/Blu-ray players and amplifiers. It's equipped with two industry-standard systems: a Tektronix VM700 video data analyser, and an Audio Precision APX585 multichannel audio analyser. Using standard test signals from discs and signal generators, these two systems are used to measure factors such as audio and video signal jitter, frequency response and output power. These give us a good general idea of the component quality, processing power and overall performance of players and amplifiers.

Professionals at large

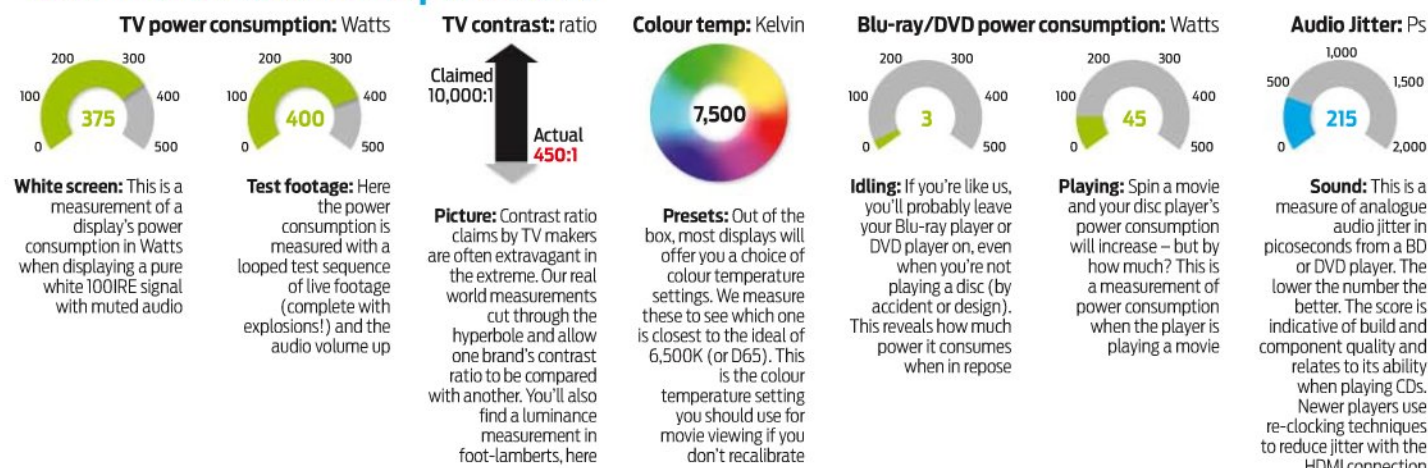
Over the years, our testers have been trained in calibration and testing techniques by the ISF, Tektronix, the Home Acoustics Alliance and other industry bodies. In short, when you read a review in *HCC*, you can be sure that the reviewer's subjective opinion is backed up by objective scientific lab testing.

Understandable and useful

One of our pledges is to present information that is both understandable and useful, for example, exposing the hype perpetrated by some makers of plasmas and LCD TVs regarding contrast ratios. To determine real world contrast, as well as measuring colour temperature presets, we employ a Sencore VP401 signal generator alongside a PC running Datacolor Colorfacts software with a Spyder 2 sensor. We use the Sencore signal generator and our own discs to generate standard TV



Tech Lab tests explained



**Test bench:**

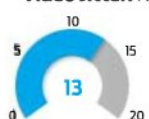
Equipment from the likes of Snell & Wilcox, and Tektronix allows us to compare all manner of kit

signals. Colorfacts analyses the colour and luminance performance of TVs and projectors, giving us information in areas such as contrast ratio, colour temperature and luminance.

Playback

Increasingly, you've been asking for more information on power consumption, and so we've now moved these

results to a headline position on our tests. We've also developed a more graphical presentation (key below) of some of the data we produce, which should make the facts more relevant and digestible. Not all the data we generate is published (frankly, you'd be bored) but all of it goes into the melting pot of opinion. While one key reviewer is bylined for our tests, as many as four team players will contribute to our findings ●

Video Jitter: Ns

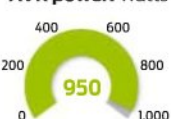
Vision: This is a measure of video jitter in nanoseconds from a BD or DVD player. The lower the number the better. The score is indicative of build and component quality. We also present figures for Chroma Crosstalk (another quality indicator) and frequency response @5.8MHz

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

15s
Tray in to main BD menu
45s

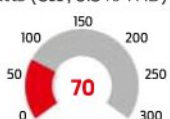
Disc loading & Java: Blu-ray players can be notoriously slow to load and play discs, thanks to the DRM and Java content of BD software. These timings are crucial to the user experience – naturally faster is best

AVR power: Watts

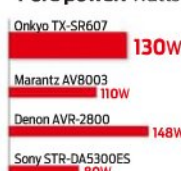
Powered: When you fire up that big AV receiver to watch a new movie you may be surprised to learn just how much current it's drawing. This is one of two measurements we take for AV amp power consumption. The other is when the AVR is powered up but idle

Amp output power: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)

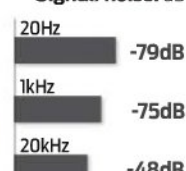
2-channel 8Ω: So just how heroic is that AVR you've been saving for? Putting aside paper claims, we measure its output in two-channel stereo mode. Also noted here is a figure for Total Harmonic Distortion



5-channel 8Ω: In most cases, an amplifier's muscle will be diminished when it runs in multichannel mode. We push the product to extremes in a 5.1 configuration to see how much grunt is available with all channels driven

Pure power: Watts

Fidelity firewall: This is our measurement of power untainted by distortion (typically 0.052THD, 8Ω, 1kHz). It's an indicator of both power output and component quality

Signal/noise: dB

S/N tests: These amp measurements reveal the ratio of noise to signal at a specific frequency. Readings taken at low, mid and high points help determine imaging clarity and sonic character

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Radiance 3 - "Best Buy" Hi-Fi Choice, June '09
Radiance 5.1 - "Top Pick" Home Theatre, August '09

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Highs: Wonderfully detailed pictures; bright, crisp colours
Lows: Black levels are a tad light; poor off-axis viewing

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/622541



SAMSUNG
32in → LE32B650
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Net-savvy 32incher is a real bargain buy

Highs: Huge feature count; excellent HD pics; sexy design
Lows: SD performance and audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/613346



SAMSUNG
46in → UE-46B8000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-flight edge-lit LED panel will sell like hot cakes

Highs: Outstanding picture quality; 200Hz works well
Lows: Some of the settings are awful; limited viewing angle

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/627639



LG
42in → 42SL8000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

LG's debut 'Borderless' LCD is excellent value for money

Highs: Colour fidelity and contrast; connectivity; design
Lows: Take care when using the 200Hz mode

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 175
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/635349



PHILIPS
42in → 42PES0001
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Philips' modular TV drops Ambilight but doesn't suffer

Highs: Sexy form factor and quality build; eye-catching images
Lows: Complex menus

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& analogue & CI slot)

Tested: Issue 168
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/579400

Also Recommended...



LG
32in → 32LH4000
£460 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Budget offering from LG delivers where it counts

Highs: Exceptional value; good design; connectivity and images
Lows: Black levels; restricted viewing angle; audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/613314



SONY
37in → KDL-40W5500
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent LCD all-rounder

Highs: Impressive dynamic contrast and smooth motion; networking features
Lows: Styling is bland; AppliCast needs more content

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/604105



TOSHIBA
42in → 42ZV555D
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Much-touted Resolution+ LCD gives a polish to SD sources

Highs: HD performance; Resolution+ doesn't disappoint
Lows: Uninspired sound and design; no Res+ over HDMI

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& analogue & CI slot)

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/492878

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Philips' groundbreaking ultra widescreen TV needs to be seen to be believed. It's deceptively large (about as wide as a traditional 65in TV) and genuinely brings a sense of cinema to your 2.35:1 movies. Expanded 16:9 material is surprisingly watchable, too. There are other frills here – Ambilight, 200Hz processing, five HDMI inputs, Net TV and DLNA certification – but it's the forward-thinking design and technology of the 21:9 that will blow you away. Whether the concept takes hold remains to be seen, though.

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/607940

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
2560 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx



Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy
Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot and DVB-S2 tuner)

Tested: Issue 164
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/487206



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx



Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD
Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/631206



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50V10B
£1,900 Approx



THX-certified, Viera Cast-touting NeoPDP

Highs: THX mode is stunning out of the box; good feature set
Lows: Unspectacular black level response; a bit chunky

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/604030



PIONEER
50in → PDP-LX5090
£2,500 Approx



Baby brother of the LX6090 Kuro panel

Highs: Unbelievable contrast and black levels; superb detail
Lows: Speakers are an optional extra only

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 159
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/417409



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx



World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity
Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus analogue)

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/467207

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx



Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel
Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 154
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/241069



PANASONIC
37in → TH-37PX80
£650 Approx



Small PDP from Panasonic continues the Viera vibe

Highs: Beautiful blacks; natural colours; good GUI
Lows: HDMI v1.2 inputs lack DeepColor support

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3 (v1.2)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/322863



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx



Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail
Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 161
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/463634

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx



THX certification, full 1080p wireless transmission, ultra-thin design...

Panasonic's flagship plasma TV is a giant leap forward for the display technology. Add in the Freesat HD tuner, Viera Cast and DLNA networkability and stunning HD and SD pictures and you begin to understand the premium price tag. Some might argue that its black levels aren't as jaw-dropping as a Pioneer Kuro – but those screens aren't being made any more. The Z1 is simply the best plasma TV you can buy.

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/613213

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p/24)
Native resolution: 1920 x 1080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.3)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (and Freesat)



Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX91
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference status BD deck is also a first-rate CD and DVD player

Highs: Stunning picture; great sound; packed with features and well-designed

Lows: Precision Quartz Lock System works with CDs only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/532605



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-P3600
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-level Samsung BD spinner

Highs: Impressive pics and sound; 7.1-channel output; DivX HD playback

Lows: No WMA support; PC streaming tricky to set up; Wi-Fi requires dongle

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, Wi-Fi via supplied dongle, USB

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/629198



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection, 7.1 analogue outputs

Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet/Wi-Fi (including YouTube), USB

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/631706



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD80
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Flagship 2009 deck adds YouTube fun to top-class specs

Highs: Full multichannel outputs; superb, detailed images; net functionality

Lows: Uninspired design; sluggish loading times

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, VieraCast, SD card slot, USB 2.0

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592252



SONY
Blu-ray → PS3 Slim
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The new Slim version of the PS3 adds some AV improvements

Highs: HD gaming, heaps of internal memory; bitstreaming of HD audio

Lows: Hungry for electricity; remote control costs extra

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (via proprietary dongle)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: 2 USB, Ethernet, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/631210

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S5000ES → £1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Sony has finally released a standalone Blu-ray deck that's comfortably better than its PlayStation 3 console. This £1,200 entry into the brand's Elevated Standard component range is a cinephile-grade machine with full Profile 2.0 support, internal decoding and bitstreaming of DTS-HD and Dolby TrueHD and best-in-class build quality. Pictures are immensely satisfying and its aural performance is exquisite. Well worth an audition if you're serious about BD.

Tested: Issue 166
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/503019

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: MicroVault card slot; LAN port

Also Recommended



OPPO
Blu-ray → BDP-83
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Get a region-hacked US import of this universal deck as Oppo has currently halted its UK launch

Highs: Superb audio performance; SACD & DVD-A playback

Lows: Upscaling is average

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Yes via Ethernet; USB (x2)

Tested: Issue 175
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



PHILIPS
Blu-ray → BDP7300
£230 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut UK deck from Philips was worth the wait

Highs: Internal 1GB storage; multichannel analogue outputs; vivid, detailed image

Lows: Stylised 'curved' look not for everyone

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes via Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 175
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/640599



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S360
£190 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Affordable Sony Blu-ray is a real rival to its PS3

Highs: Stylish design and good AV performance; very solid construction

Lows: External memory required for BD-Live access

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 175
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/640599

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DVD Players

Best on test...



OPPO
DVD → DV-981HD
£180 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent multiformat player with serious upscaling chipper

Highs: Excellent video processing; DVD-A and SACD playback; multiregion

Lows: Average pics from DivX files; online purchase only

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: Yes
DVD A/SACD: Both
HDMI out: 1 (plus free cable)
Component: No
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 154
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/240790



PRIMARE
DVD → DVDi10
£1,750 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

High-end DVD deck with stereo amplifier and DAB/FM/AM radio

Highs: Superb build quality; top-notch picture and sound

Lows: No DivX, DVD-Audio or Super Audio CD support; confusing remote

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: No, oddly
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, VCD, SVCD, CD-R, CD-RW, DVD-R, DVD+R, MP3, JPEG

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/620774



PIONEER
DVD → DV-LX50
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

DVD component of Pioneer's LX range is a star performer

Highs: Fabulous build and styling; quality upscaled picture and audio performance

Lows: Complex onscreen display

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: Both
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, XviD, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 156
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/248240



DENON
DVD → DVD-1940
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Yet another quality upscaling deck from Denon

Highs: 1080p upscaling is tidy; SD performance is good too; wide format compatibility

Lows: Bland styling; stereo performance could be better

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: Both
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 156
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/365528



TOSHIBA
DVD → SD490
£50 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Budget DVD deck from Toshiba gets the job done

Highs: Well-contrasted picture; upscaling makes a difference; a doddle to use

Lows: No USB input; struggles with jaggies

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: No
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, JPEG, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DVD-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW, SVCD, Video CD

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/629178

Also Recommended...



ONKYO
DVD → DV-SP406
£100 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Quality upscaling at an affordable price

Highs: Picture quality mainly; front-mounted USB jack for multimedia playback

Lows: Bland looks and unimpressive build quality

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080i
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: No
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 168
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/586445



ARCAM
DVD → DV-135
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Universal deck that takes DVD as far as it can go. Nearly

Highs: 720p upscaling and CD performance

Lows: No multichannel output for SACD/DVD-A, no 1080p output mode

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080i
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: Both, stereo only
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, HDCD, DVD+R/-R, DVD-RW, and DVD+RW

Tested: Issue 149
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/283946



LG
DVD → DVS450H
£100 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish wall-mountable deck with USB and DivX HD support

Highs: Solid DVD playback; eye-catching design; DivX HD performance is startling

Lows: Can't be rack-mounted; not DTS decoding

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: No
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: No
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital
Other formats: CD, MP3, JPEG, MPEG-4, MPEG-4 HD, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DivX HD, DVD+R/-R, DVD+/-RW

Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/492983

Editor's Choice...

TOSHIBA
DVD → XDE-500 → £100 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Having crashed and burned with HD DVD, Toshiba fought back with this revolutionary upscaling DVD player. Powered by the brand's super-powered eXtended Detail Enhancement (XDE) technology, it breathes new life into standard DVDs – of which most of us have many. Build quality is a little lacking (reflecting the bargain price) but otherwise this is an easy product to recommend – with the brand's first BD player imminent, watch the price fall.

Tested: Issue 161
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/460536



→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No, but hackable
DVD A/SACD: Nope
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1 (480/576 only)
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: DVD-R/DVD-RW/CD/CD-R/CD-RW/CD, MP3, JPEG, DivX, XviD

DVD Recorders

Best on test...



SONY
DVDR → RDR-HXD995
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Heavyweight Freeview+ unit with features galore

Highs: Excellent AV performance; flexible recording modes; multimedia prowess

Lows: Records 'interactive red dot'; possible aerial sensitivity

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 250GB
Upscaling: 1080p
HDMI: 1
Component video: Yes (progressive)
RGB Scart in: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Tuner: Yes. Digital & Analogue
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW
Dual layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/494543



PANASONIC
DVDR → MR-EX79
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

2009 DVD/HDD recorder improves slightly on the EX78

Highs: AV performance is first-rate; heaps of features and recording flexibility

Lows: No STB control; can't copy DivX/JPEG to HDD

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 250GB
Upscaling: 1080p
HDMI: 1
Component video: Yes (progressive)
RGB Scart in: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Tuner: Yes. Digital & Analogue
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 169

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/592255



PIONEER
DVDR → DVR-560HX
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Full PC-linked multimedia jukebox and DVD/HDD unit

Highs: Excellent AV performance and features spread; networkability

Lows: Jukebox abilities reliant on Windows Media Player

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 160GB
Upscaling: 1080p
HDMI: 1
Component video: Yes (progressive)
RGB Scart in: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Tuner: Yes. Digital & analogue
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 159

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/417978



LG
DVDR/3.1 → HRT403DA
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Convergence king offers 3.1 audio and HDD/DVD recording

Highs: Acceptable, punchy audio; well-specified recorder; quality DVD pictures

Lows: Lacks DTS support; no 5.1 upgrade path

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 160GB
Upscaling: 1080p
HDMI: 1
Component video: Yes (progressive)
RGB Scart in: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Tuner: Yes. Digital & Analogue
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/490848



PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BS850
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Blu-ray/DVD/Freesat/HDD recorder is a convergence king

Highs: Amazingly versatile; superb BD record quality; twin Freesat tuners; Viera Cast

Lows: AVCHD dubs to DVD in SD; premium price tag

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 500GB
Upscaling: 1080p
HDMI: 1
Component video: Yes (progressive)
RGB Scart in: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Tuner: Yes. 2 x Freesat HD
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

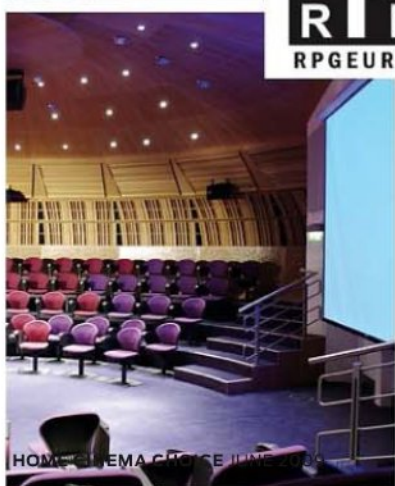
Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/599118



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PVRs

Best on test...



GOODMANS
PVR → GHD2521F2
£130 Approx



Budget-priced twin-tuner Freeview+ PVR with 250GB of hard disk storage

Highs: Superb GUI; competent AV performance and large HDD

Lows: No upgrade path for pay-TV. Some editing glitches

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: Yes
Component output: No
RGB Scart: Yes
CI-slot: No
Digital tuner: Freeview
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 159
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/418531



HUMAX
PVR → PVR-9300T
£200 Approx



Souped-up Humax drops USB socket but boosts HDD capacity

Highs: Easy and responsive to use; fine AV performance; well-featured

Lows: Limited HDMI modes; no USB functionality

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes
Component output: Yes
RGB Scart: Yes
CI-slot: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/460642



SAGEM
PVR → DTR67500T
£180 Approx



500GB Freeview+ PVR with USB archiving

Highs: Capacious HDD; flexible and intuitive EPG; picture quality is excellent

Lows: No way of importing recordings from other devices

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes
Component output: Yes
RGB Scart: Yes
CI-slot: No
Digital tuner: Freeview
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/608808



HUMAX
Freesat PVR → Foxsat HDR
£300 Approx



First Freesat HD PVR brings extra clout to fledgling system

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback

Lows: Annoying LCD; slow to boot up; needs more HD content!

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes
Component output: No
RGB Scart: Yes
CI-slot: Yes
Tuner: Freesat HD (satellite – requires dish)
Freeview+: No

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/489319



TOPFIELD
PVR → TF5810PVR
£350 Approx



Freeview+ PVR with enormous 500GB HDD

Highs: Easy to use; PC connectivity; upscales Freeview; twin tuners offer great flexibility

Lows: Competing with high-end DVD recorders

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes
Component output: No
RGB Scart: yes
CI-slot: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 156
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/262044

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AV Receivers

Best on test...



PIONEER
AVR → SC-LX82
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

ICE-powered AIR Studios-tuned AVR replaces the SC-LX81

Highs: Punchy, highly detailed sound; brilliant features; looks fabulous; solid build

Lows: Pioneer doesn't do height/width processing

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 190W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: THX Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 175

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/640376



SONY
AVR → STR-DA5400ES
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class-leading mid-priced AVR with power and poise

Highs: Excellent build; audiophile SACD and CD playback; full of power

Lows: No Ethernet port, THX certification or DAB radio

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/503066



ONKYO
AVR → TX-SR607
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD receiver with Dolby 'Height' processing

Highs: Excellent onscreen display; twin subwoofer outputs

Lows: Dolby Pro-Logic II not as versatile as Audyssey DSX

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 145W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes (stereo audio only)
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/596948



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon

Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/623954



DENON
AVR → AVR-2309
£600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD audio unit lacks networking but sounds superb

Highs: Fabulous balance with HD audio; punchy sound with CDs; powerful

Lows: No networking and only 1 HDMI output

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 100W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 162

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/466939

Editor's Choice...

ARCAM
AVR → SC-LX81
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

British manufacturer Arcam arrived late to the HD audio party, but the AVR600 is certainly worth the wait. Utilising a Class G analogue amplifier, this silver machine is cool-running and efficient, while an entire 'root and branch' overhaul of multichannel AV amp design has allowed Arcam to tackle audio jitter head on. Yet this isn't purely an audiophile product – it's packed with custom install features, offers an insane array of connections, and delivers Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA Blu-ray mixes with aplomb. A class act from a classic brand.

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/613252

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: DAB/AM/FM
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and Zone 3
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 5
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)



Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use

Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/629727



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR906
£1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

THX Ultra2 Plus AVR with ISF tweakery is Onkyo's flagship

Highs: Powerful; superb video processor; full-on up front sound; networkability

Lows: Operational issues; build quality could be better

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 200W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 164

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com//476747



YAMAHA
Amp → DSP-Z7
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Trimmed-down version of the award-winning Z11

Highs: Large sound with huge bass and plenty of detail

Lows: Orange display; disconcerting pops when changing sources

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: No ('net only)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (5.1)

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/612358

Projectors

Best on test...



SIM2
DLP → Grand Cinema
C3X 1080
£23,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference-status PJ with brilliant colour management

Highs: Gorgeous design; small form factor; dazzling pictures

Lows: SD processing isn't quite hi-end enough for the price

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): NA
Contrast (claimed): 10,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/591731



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW3800
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A flawless example of cutting-edge 1080p LCD PJ technology

Highs: Quiet in operation; looks classy; superb picture; easy setup

Lows: Higher-end rivals deliver deeper black levels

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 18,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/527031



JVC
D-ILA → HD350
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Fantastically filmic PJ is a steal at £3,500

Highs: Stunning picture quality; runs quietly; easy and flexible to setup

Lows: No direct PC hookup; DLP rivals may be brighter

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 30,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/532631



OPTOMA
DLP → Themescene HD82
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A tasty development of a distinguished product line

Highs: Good blacks levels; impressive colour performance; easy to set up

Lows: Some dynamic iris noise; some DLP rainbow effect

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2 x v1.3
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 20,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/620868



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE3000
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent all-rounder packed with user-friendly features

Highs: Good black level, contrast and colours; flexibility; quiet running

Lows: Needs tweaking for best results; no 12V trigger

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 3
Component inputs: 2
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 60,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 166
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/503174

Also Recommended...



CINEVERSUM
LCoS → BlackWing One
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sexily-styled French LCoS model undercuts JVC and Sony

Highs: Sharp; colourful images; versatile setup and installation options

Lows: Average black level lets the BlackWing One down

Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,200 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/630706



SANYO
LCD → PLV-Z3000
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Solid HD performer with a few minor niggles

Highs: Flexible lens settings; quiet operation; tasty price

Lows: Lacks basic niceties like a 12V trigger and remote focus; black levels aren't best in class

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 2
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 65,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): N/A
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/532622



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan

Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/620783

Editor's Choice...

SONY
SXR → VPL-VW850
£5,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



The successor to the well-received VW80 again shows that Sony's SXR-branded LCoS wizardry can take on any challengers in the high-end projector market. The copious picture tweaks available mean achieving a truly cinematic picture is a doddle; the astonishing contrast ratio and detail levels help, too. Add in the 12V trigger, bundled gamma adjustment software and near silent running, and we reckon this could become an installers' fave.

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/627126

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: VGA
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

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SONY BDPS360



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- » Blu-ray Player, DVD 1080p Upscale
- » Digital Plus/Dts HD Sound

£145

SAVE £95

SONY BDPS760



Blu-ray Player

- » Blu-ray Player, DVD 1080p Upscale
- » BD-Live, HDMI x1

£299

SAVE £100

PANASONIC DMRBS850



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- » 500GB HDD, HDMI x1

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CINEMA SYSTEMS

SAMSUNG HTBD1220



2.1 Blu-ray System

- » Blu-ray Player, 1080p Upscale
- » Digital Plus/Dts HD Sound

£319

SAVE £70

PANASONIC SCBT200



7 Free Blu-ray Movies Offer

5.1 Blu-ray System

- » Blu-ray Player, iPod Dock
- » Digital Plus/Dts HD Sound

£399

SAVE £180

LG HB954PB



5.1 Blu-ray System

- » Blu-ray Player, DVD Upscale
- » Digital Plus/Dts HD Sound

£569

GREAT VALUE

SONY DAVDZ680W



5.1 Home Cinema System

- » DVD Player with 1080p Upscale
- » HDMI Connection

£359

GREAT VALUE

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YAMAHA PDX50



Wireless Docking Station

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DENON DM37DAB



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DENON	AVR1910	£1299	£1025	£1499	£1175	£999	£825	£1049	£835	£1349	£1005	£1749	£1285	£2049	£1495
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DENON	AVR3310	£2049	£1585	£2249	£1735	£1749	£1395	£1799	£1435	£2099	£1545	£2499	£1835	£2799	£2045
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SONY	STRDH800	£1149	£965	£1349	£1125	£849	£695	£899	£715	£1199	£945	£1599	£1225	£1899	£1425
YAMAHA	RXV365BL	£1099	£885	£1299	£1025	£799	£675	£849	£675	£1149	£865	£1549	£1175	£1849	£1375
YAMAHA	RXV465BL	£1199	£955	£1399	£1095	£899	£765	£949	£755	£1249	£935	£1649	£1235	£1949	£1435
YAMAHA	RXV565BL	£1299	£1025	£1499	£1165	£999	£845	£1049	£835	£1349	£1015	£1749	£1295	£2049	£1495
YAMAHA	RXV765BL	£1399	£1095	£1599	£1235	£1099	£935	£1149	£895	£1449	£1065	£1849	£1345	£2149	£1555
YAMAHA	RXV1065BL	£1599	£1245	£1799	£1405	£1299	£965	£1249	£995	£1549	£1195	£2049	£1495	£2349	£1695
YAMAHA	RXV3900BL	£2349	£1825	£2549	£1985	£2049	£1545	£1999	£1595	£2399	£1795	£2799	£2095	£3099	£2275
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	SONY KDL32W5500U  32" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freeview, Motionflow 100Hz » 4x HDMI Connections £569 GREAT VALUE	SONY KDL37W5500U  37" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freeview, Motionflow 100Hz » 4x HDMI Connections £679 SAVE £220	SONY KDL40W5500U  40" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freeview, Motionflow 100Hz » 4x HDMI Connections £729 SAVE £370	SONY KDL46Z5500U  46" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freeview, Motionflow 200Hz » 4x HDMI Connections £1499 GREAT VALUE
	LG 26LG4000  26" HD READY LCD/DVD TV » Freeview, Integrated DVD Player » 3x HDMI Connections £359 GREAT VALUE	LG 37LF7700  37" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freesat, 50,000:1 Contrast » 3x HDMI Connections £499 SAVE £600	LG 42LH4000  42" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freeview, Intelligent Sensor II » 3x HDMI Connections £599 GREAT VALUE	LG 50PS3000  50" HD 1080P PLASMA TV » Freeview, 2,000,000:1 Contrast » 3x HDMI Connections £699 GREAT VALUE
	PANASONIC TXL37S10B  37" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freeview, Smart Networking » 3x HDMI Connections £549 SAVE £300	PANASONIC TXP46S10B  46" HD 1080P Plasma TV » Freeview, 400Hz Scan » 3x HDMI Connections £849 GREAT VALUE	PHILIPS 32PFL7404H  32" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freeview, Pixel Precise 100Hz Scan » 4x HDMI Connections £549 FREE 5 YR WARRANTY	PHILIPS 42PFL9664H  42" HD 1080P LCD TV » Freeview, Ambilight Spectra 2 » 5x HDMI Connections £1499 FREE 5 YR WARRANTY
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Subwoofers

Best on test...



BK
SW → XLS200
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

10in driver married to high- and line-level inputs

Highs: Deep and extended output; disproportionately powerful; compact

Lows: Bland styling

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 22Hz-100Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 275W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 12.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 151

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/249083



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent i
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance

Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/532655



BOWERS & WILKINS
SW → ASW608
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Compact subwoofer ideal for smaller rooms

Highs: Excellent grip and musical low-end control

Lows: Limited by its size

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 23Hz-140Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 200W
Driver: 8in
Weight: 8.85kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 160

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/423217



VELODYNE
SW → DD-10
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

We love the see-thru version of this excellent bass shifter

Highs: Thrilling performance, special edition finishes

Lows: You can get more muscle for the money

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,250W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 26kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 158

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/381347



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration

Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/613234

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Speaker Systems

Best on test...



BOSTON ACOUSTICS
5.1 → VS Series
£5,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Enormous sound; scintillating HF performance

Lows: Subwoofer feels underpowered compared to surrounds

→ Specifications

Power handling: 2 x 400, 3 x 250W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/623230



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build

Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 160W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/597086



CABASSE
5.1 → EOLE 2
£1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Quirky-looking 5.1 sub/sat system

Highs: Design and build; flexible mounting; warm, involving voice

Lows: Slightly rough high frequencies; power handling disappoints; limited bass

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 70W,
4 x 100W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 169

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/591911



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 9
€4,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent THX Ultra2-system with industrial styling and build

Highs: Great bass extension; huge scale and accuracy; pleasing to look at, too

Lows: Stands or wall bracket fittings are extra; subwoofer is huuuuuge!

→ Specifications

Power handling: 3 x 240W, 1 x 180W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 700W
Finish: Alu; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/502870



MISSION
5.1 → 79 Series
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Floor-standing system with innovative side-firing bass drivers

Highs: Sophisticated and clean-sounding; excellent stereo imagery; easy on the eye

Lows: Not the most powerful or deepest bass in its class; won't go super-loud

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 200W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears only

Tested: Issue 171

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/605119

Also Recommended...



JAMO
5.1 → A 102 HCS 5
£330 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Good-value 5.1 system with living-room-friendly size/looks

Highs: Relaxed, intelligible dialogue presentation; available online for as little as £200

Lows: Subwoofer lacks real subterranean power; small satellites lend a rawness to the audio

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 60W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Cherry; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/597043



ACOUSTIC ENERGY
5.1 → Radiance 5.1
£3,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Beautiful big box array delivers effortless, clean sound

Highs: Huge scale and volume; plenty of treble detail; ample bass weight from the front speaker

Lows: Subwoofer is a little lacklustre

→ Specifications

Power handling: 2 x 200W,
3 x 150
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 175

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/627086



MJ ACOUSTICS
5.1 → Xeno
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Compact design; strong centre channel; feisty, versatile subwoofer

Lows: Lacks the scale of dispersion required for larger rooms

→ Specifications

Power handling: 4 x 100W,
1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 120W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 161

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/423010

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio

experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/629165

→ Specifications

Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance

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on the side of the cable.



Essentials

Best on test...



LINKSYS
Media Server
NMH410 → £350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The poster boy of the new NAS generation

Highs: Beautifully built and whisper quiet; intelligent syncing with your PC
Lows: No integrated BitTorrent support; won't stream DRM-lashed content

→ Specifications

Drive Bays: 2 SATA (one pre-installed with 1TB HDD)
2 x USB ports
PC backup with NTI Shadow software
DLNA 1.5 certified

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/613297



LOGITECH
Remote control
Harmony 1100
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Upgrade from the 1000 adds new software, GUI and layout

Highs: Massive, and expanding, online database of control codes; macro setup; user-friendly
Lows: RF control is only available as an extra

→ Specifications

3.5in colour touchscreen
Lithium-ion battery
Charging station
USB cable
Quick-start guide
AC adapter

Tested: Issue 168
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/586508



POPCORN HOUR
NAS media streamer
A-110 → £260 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A flexible multimedia streamer with an online cult following...

Highs: Quiet in use; insanely versatile; extensive connections; HD streaming works well
Lows: Simple construction; inadequate manual

→ Specifications

256MB DDR SDRAM; 32MB Flash memory
NAS access: SMB, NFS, FTP
Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD audio passthrough
Extensive file support

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592095



LACIE
HD media centre
La Cinema Black
Max → £390 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sleek-looking media server with PVR functionality

Highs: Excellent AV performance; clear and intuitive menus; compatible with a huge range of media
Lows: Quite an expensive way to do what it does

→ Specifications

500GB HDD
1080i upscaling of SD movies
DVB-T tuner
MPEG-1, MPEG-2 / HD, MPEG-4, DIVX, XVID, H.264 HD, WMV9 HD video codec support

Tested: Issue 170
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/599128



TECHNISAT
Freesat HD receiver → HDFS
£190 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Freesat HD receiver with added technical flair

Highs: Fast auto install; fine performance; lip-sync facility; 'unlocked' Ethernet capability allows networking
Lows: Can instruct a Scart-fed recorder, but lacks a Series Link facility

→ Specifications

Freesat HD tuner
Ethernet port
2 x Scart (1 RGB)
USB port/Card readers for JPEG; MPEG-2 and MP3 playback
Optional Wi-Fi dongle

Tested: Issue 175
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/629186

Also Recommended...



HAUPPAUGE
PVR → HD PVR
£150 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Back up your Sky+ HD box via component

Highs: Supplied with comprehensive software suite
Lows: No built-in storage; requires powerful PC

→ Specifications

USB: Yes – use this to hookup to your PC
Component, S-video, stereo and optical digital audio (use the latter for recording Dolby Digital 5.1)

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/490892



WYPLAY
Media player → Wyplayer
£430 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Twin-tuner PVR with networking nous

Highs: Incredibly flexible and powerful
Lows: Overdesigned GUI; annoying remote; pricey

→ Specifications

Twin digital tuners
HDMI output to 1080i
Optical audio output
Ethernet/wi-fi
500GB HDD
3 x USB 2.0 host
MPEG-1/2, MPEG-4 (AVC/H.264); WM9, XviD and DivX file support

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/618263



SHARKOON
Gaming Headphones
X-tatic → £110 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Dolby Digital 5.1 cans add another level to gaming

Highs: Creates truly immersive audio and a believable bubble of sound; comfortable to wear
Lows: No wireless option

→ Specifications

8 speakers (4 in each earpiece)
PS3, Xbox and Xbox 360 chat function
Sound control unit: 1 x optical input; 2 x analogue audio; 3 x analogue 3.5 mm audio outputs; DD 2.0, 5.1 and Pro-Logic decoders

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592328

Editor's Choice...

IOmega
NAS storage
StorCenter iX2
£320

1 2 3 4 5

This diminutive 2TB NAS device from Iomega (with painless installation, two-disk RAID array, USB 2.0 ports and Bluetooth connectivity) makes PC backup and network media distribution a doddle. And it looks sexy, too.



Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/532738

→ Specifications

2 TB capacity
Windows PC, Mac OS and Linux compatible
Two USB 2.0 ports (host, to connect external HDD or printers)
10/100/1000Mbps Ethernet connection

Top Five Blu-rays

Got a Blu-ray player? Then get these titles...

- Children of Men** 1 2 3 4 5
Riveting sci-fi gets the HD release it deserves
- Battlestar Galactica: Complete Series** 1 2 3 4 5
All the Cylon-fused adventures in one box
- Braveheart: XV Anniversary Edition** 1 2 3 4 5
A thunderous HD debut for Gibson's epic
- Watchmen: Director's Cut** 1 2 3 4 5
Adult-friendly comic adaptation
- 24: Season Seven** 1 2 3 4 5
Jack Bauer's back, and feeling Blu

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